

QUEER-SIDE
STORIES
BY
JAS. SULLIVAN

W. E. Roberts

QUEER SIDE STORIES



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

#59546

QUEER
SIDE
STORIES

BY

JAS. F. SULLIVAN

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

BY THE AUTHOR

DOWNEY & CO. LIMITED
12 YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

1900

LONDON :
PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LTD.,
ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL, E.C.

*The Author's thanks are due to Sir George Newnes
for his kindness in connection with some of these stories
reprinted from the STRAND MAGAZINE.*

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE STORY OF THE KING'S IDEA	1
IMPOSSIBILITY	13
THE END OF WAR	26
MOOZEBY	40
MORE OF MOOZEBY	54
THE IDENTITY OF MR. PUSH	68
OLD JOE'S PICNIC	84
THE BIRTH-RATE	100
MR. HAY	112
THE BEAUTY COLLEGE CO.	129
THE UNBELIEVERS' CLUB	143
THE JUDGE'S PENANCE	163
THE MAN WITH A MALADY	180
A USE FOR GENIUS	200
THE THINNER OUT	215
THE DWINDLING HOUR	228
THE DISADVANTAGES OF MIND	243
ABRAHAM FLEETER'S WEARINESS	257
THE ASTRAL THRUPPE	276

THE STORY OF THE KING'S IDEA



ONE day the Lord Chamberlain rushed into the throne-room of the palace, panting with excitement. The aristocracy assembled there crowded round him with intense interest.

“The King has just got a new Idea!” he gasped, with eyes round with admiration. “Such a magnificent Idea—!”



“It is indeed! Marvellous!” said the aristocracy. “By Jove—really the most brilliant Idea we ever—!”



“But you haven’t heard the Idea yet,” said the Lord Chamberlain. “It’s this,” and he proceeded to tell them the Idea. They were stricken dumb with reverential admiration; it was some time before they could even coo little murmurs of inarticulate wonder.

“The King has just got a new Idea,” cried the Royal footman (who was also reporter to the Press), bursting into the office of *The Courtier*, the leading aristocratic paper, with ears for composers, and heirs to baroneteies for devils.



“Has he, indeed? Splendid!” cried the

editor. "Here, Jones"—(the Duke of Jones, chief leader-writer)—"just let me have three columns in praise of the King's Idea. Enlarge upon the glorious results it will bring about in the direction of national glory, imperial unity, commercial prosperity, individual liberty and morality, domestic—"



"But hadn't I better tell you the Idea?" said the reporter.

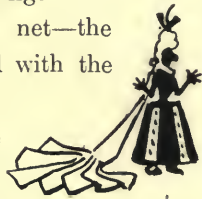
"Well, you might do that perhaps," said the editor.

Then the footman went off to the office of the *Immovable*—the leading paper of the Hangback party, and cried, "The King has got a new Idea!"

"Ha!" said the editor. "Mr. Smith will you kindly do me a column in support of His Majesty's new Idea?"

"Hum! Well, you see," put in Mr. Smith, the eminent journalist. "How about the new contingent of readers you said you were anxious to net—the readers who are not altogether satisfied with the recent attitude of His Majesty?"

"Oh! ah! I quite forgot," said the editor. "Look here, then, just do me an enigmatical and oracular article that can be read either way."



"Right," replied the eminent journalist.

"By the way I didn't tell you the Idea," suggested the footman.

"Oh! that doesn't matter; but there, you can if you like," said the editor.

After that the footman sold the news of the idea to an ordinary reporter, who

dealt with the *Rushahead* and the revolutionary papers ; and the reporter ran to the office of the *Whirler*, the leading *Rushahead* paper.

“ King? New Idea?” said the editor of the *Whirler*. “ Here, do me five columns of amiable satire upon the King’s Idea ; keep up the tone of loyalty—tolerant loyalty—of course ; and try to keep hold of those readers the *Immovable* is fishing for, of course.”



“ Very good,” said Brown.

“ Shall I tell you the Idea?” asked the reporter.

“ Oh, yes ; if you want to,” replied the editor.

Then the reporter rushed off to the *Shouter*, the leading revolutionary journal.

“ Here !—hi !—Cruncher !” shouted the editor ; “ King’s got a new Idea. Do me a whole number full of scathing satire, bitter recrimination, vague menace, and so on, about the King’s Idea. Dwell on the selfishness and class-invidiousness of the Idea—on the resultant injury to the working classes and the poor ; show how it is another deliberate blow to the writhing son of toil—you know.”



“ I know,” said Redwrag, the eminent Trafalgar Square journalist.

“ Wouldn’t you like to hear what the Idea is?” asked the reporter.

“ No, I should NOT !” thundered the editor. “ Don’t defile my ears with particulars !”



The moment the public heard how the King had got a new Idea, they rushed to their newspapers to ascertain what judgment they ought to form upon it; and, as the newspaper writers had carefully thought out what sort of judgment their public would like to form upon it, the leading articles exactly reflected the views which that public feebly and half-consciously held, but would have feared to express without support; and everything was prejudiced and satisfactory.



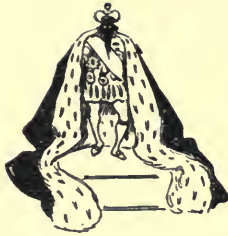
Well, on the whole, the public verdict was decidedly in favour of the King's Idea, which enabled the newspapers gradually to work up a fervent enthusiasm in their columns; until at length it had become the very finest Idea ever evolved. After a time it was suggested that a day should be fixed for public rejoicings in celebration of the King's Idea; and the scheme grew until it was decided in the Lords and Commons that the King should proceed in state to the cathedral on the day of rejoicing, and be crowned as Emperor in honour of the Idea. There was only one little



bit of dissent in the Lower House; and that was when Mr. Corderoy, M.P. for the Rattenwell Division of Strikeston, moved, as an amendment, that Bill Firebrand, dismissed by his employer for blowing up his factory, should be allowed a civil service pension.

So the important day came, and everybody took a holiday except the pickpockets and the police; and the King was crowned Emperor in the cathedral, with a grand choral service; and





the Laureate wrote a fine poem calling upon the universe to admire the Idea, and describing the King as the greatest and most virtuous King ever invented. It was a very fine poem, beginning :—



Notion that roars and rolls, lapping the stars with its hem ;
Bursting the bands of Space, dwarfing eternal Aye.

It became tacitly admitted that the King was the very greatest King in the world ; and he was made an honorary fellow of the Society of Wiseacres and D.C.L. of the universities.

But one day it leaked out that the Idea was *not* the King's but the Prime Minister's. It would not have been known but for the Prime Minister having taken offence at the refusal of the King to appoint a Socialist agitator to the vacant post of Lord Chamberlain. You see, it was this way—the Prime Minister was very anxious to get in his right-hand man for the eastern division of Grumbury, N. Now, the Revolutionaries were very strong in the eastern division of Grumbury, and, by winning the favour of the agitator, the votes of the revolutionaries would be secured. So, when the King refused to appoint the agitator, the Prime Minister, out of nastiness, let out that the Idea had really been his, and that he had suggested it to the King.



There were great difficulties now ; for the honours which had been conferred on the King because of his Idea could not be cancelled ; the title of Emperor could not be taken

away again, nor the great poem unwritten. The latter step, especially, was not to be thought of; for a leading firm of publishers were just about to issue an *édition de luxe* of the poem with sumptuous illustrations, engraved on diamond, from the pencil of an eminent R.A. who had become a classic and forgotten how to draw. (His name, however, could still draw: so he left the matter to that.)

Well, everybody, except a few newspapers, said nothing about the King's part in the affair; but the warmest eulogies were passed on the Prime Minister by the papers of his political persuasion, and by the public in general. The Prime Minister was now the most wonderful person in existence; and a great public testimonial was got up for him in the shape of a wreath cut out of a



single ruby; the colonies got up a millennial exhibition in his honour, at which the chief exhibits were his cast-off clothes, a lock of his hair, a bad sixpence he had passed, and other relics. He was invited everywhere 'at once; and it became the fashion for ladies to send him a slice of bread and butter to take a bite out of, and subsequently frame the slice with the piece bitten out, or wear it on State occasions as a necklacc pendant.

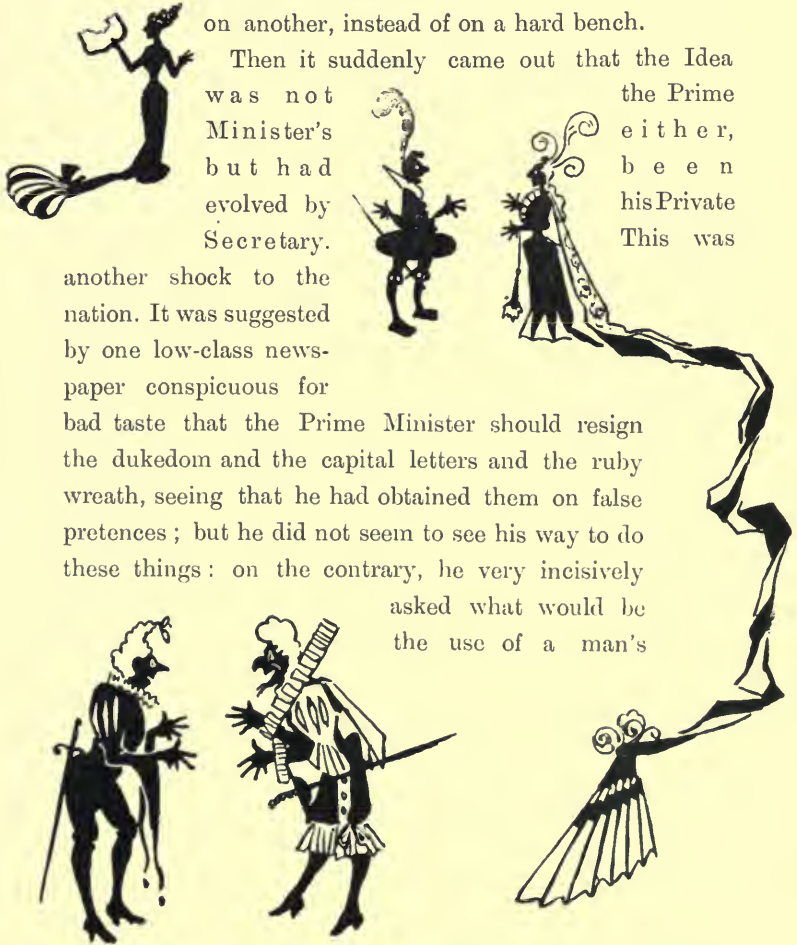


At length the King felt himself, with many wry faces, compelled to make the Prime Minister a K.C.B., a K.G., and other typographical combinations, together with an earl, and subsequently a duke.

So the Prime Minister retired luxuriously to the Upper House and sat in a nice armchair, with his feet on another, instead of on a hard bench.

Then it suddenly came out that the Idea was not the Prime Minister's but had evolved by his Private Secretary. This was

another shock to the nation. It was suggested by one low-class newspaper conspicuous for bad taste that the Prime Minister should resign the dukedom and the capital letters and the ruby wreath, seeing that he had obtained them on false pretences; but he did not seem to see his way to do these things: on the contrary, he very incisively asked what would be the use of a man's



becoming Prime Minister if it was only to resign things to which he had no right. Still, he did the handsome thing: he presented an autograph portrait of himself to the

Secretary, together with a new £5 note, as a recognition of any inconvenience he might have suffered in consequence of the mistake.



Now, too, there was another little difficulty: the Private Secretary was, to a certain extent, an influential man, but not sufficiently influential for an Idea of his to be so brilliant as one evolved by a King or a Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the Press and the public generously decided that the Idea was a good one, although it had its assailable points; so the Private Secretary was considerably boomed in the dailies and weeklies, and interviewed (with portrait) in the magazines; and he was a made man.



But, after he had got made, it was accidentally divulged that the Idea had never been his at all, but had sprung from the intelligence of his brother, an obscure Government Clerk.

There it was again—the Private Secretary, having been made, could not be disintegrated; so he continued to enjoy his good luck, with the exception of the £5 note, which the Prime Minister privately requested him to return with interest at ten per cent.

It was put about at first that the Clerk who had originated the Idea was a person of some position; and so the Idea continued to enjoy a certain amount of eulogy and commendation; but when it was subsequently divulged that the Clerk was merely a nobody, and only had a salary of five-and-twenty shillings a week on account of his having no lord for a relation, it was at once seen that the Idea, although

THE STORY OF THE KING'S IDEA

ingenious, was really, on being looked into, hardly a practicable one. However, the affair brought the Clerk into notice; so he went on the stage just as the excitement over the affair was at its height, and made quite a success, although he couldn't act a bit.

And then it was proved beyond a doubt that the Clerk had not found the Idea at all, but had got it from a Pauper whom he knew in the St. Weektee's union workhouse. So the Clerk was called upon in the Press to



give up his success on the boards and go back to his twenty-five shilling clerkship; but he refused to do this, and wrote a letter to a newspaper, headed, "Need an actor be able to act?" and, it being the off-season and the subject a

likely one, the letter was answered next day by a member of the newspaper's staff temporarily disguised as "A Call-Boy"—and all this gave the Clerk another lift.



About the Pauper's Idea there was no difficulty whatever; every newspaper and every member of the public had perceived long ago, on the Idea being originally mooted, that there was really nothing at all in it; and the *Chuckler* had a very funny article bursting with new and flowery turns of speech, by its special polyglot contributor who made you die o'laughing about the Peirastic and Percipient Pauper.

So the Pauper was not allowed his evening out for a month; and it became a question whether he ought not to be brought up before a magistrate and charged with some-

thing or other; but the matter was magnanimously permitted to drop.

By this time the public had had a little too much of it, as they were nearly reduced to beggary by the contributions they had given to one ideologue after another; and they



certainly would have lynched any new aspirant to the Idea, had one (sufficiently uninfluential) turned up.

And, meanwhile, the Idea had been quietly taken up and set going by a select company of patriotic personages who were in a position to start the ball rolling; and the Idea grew, and developed, and developed, until it had attained considerable proportions and could be seen to be full of vast potentialities either for the welfare or the injury of the Empire, according to the way in which it might be worked out.

Now, at the outset, owing to tremendous opposition from various quarters, the Idea worked out so badly that it threatened incalculable harm to the commerce and general happiness of the realm; whereupon the public decided that it certainly *must* have originated with the Pauper; and they

went and dragged him from the workhouse, and were about to hang him to a lamp-post, when news arrived that the



Idea was doing less harm to the Empire than had been supposed.

So they let the Pauper go ; for it became evident to them that it had been the Clerk's Idea ; and just as they were deliberating what to do with the Clerk, it was discovered that the Idea was really



beginning to work out very well indeed, and was decidedly increasing the prosperity of the realm. Thereupon the public decided that it must have been the Private Secretary's Idea, after all ; and were just setting out in a deputation to thank the Private Secretary, when fresh reports arrived showing that the Idea was a very great national boon ; and then the public felt that it *must* have originated with the Prime Minister, in spite of all that had been said to the contrary.

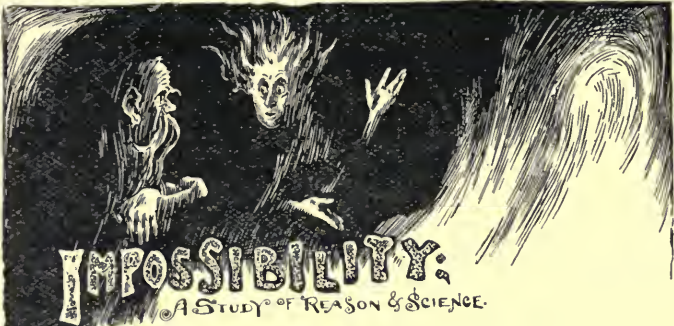
But in the course of a few months, everybody in the land became aware that the tide of national prosperity and happiness was indeed advancing in the most glorious way, and all owing to the Great Idea ; and *now* they perceived as one man that it had been the King's own Idea, and no doubt about the matter. So they made another day of rejoicing, and presented



the King with a diamond throne and a new crown with "A. 1." in large letters upon it. And that King was ever after known as the very greatest King that had ever reigned.

But it was the Pauper's Idea after all.





SOME time ago, amid the monotonous ether of space, long before the existence of planets and all that, two spirits were strolling along in company.

In aspect the two companions differed in the most pronounced way. On the brow of the one, who might have passed for the elder, appeared the cold and passionless calculation of science; the eye was deeply reflective, but unemotional; the demeanour was grave and deliberate. We may as well speak of this spirit henceforth as William.

The younger, whom we will call James, was of a very different stamp; for in him the quick and well-opened eye, the mobile brow and mouth, and the eager voice, denoted enthusiasm and enterprise.

As we have remarked, the scene was monotonous; it is easily described: stretching away and away for ever in every direction spread space and utter and intense darkness.

What wonder, then, that surrounded by so dull and uninteresting a monotony, living through an indefinite period

enlivened by no divisions of time, the soul of James should have cast about within itself for some recreative topic, some object on which to expend its imaginative energies. In truth James was a dreamer—a wild and fantastic dreamer, if you will. Sitting alone, perhaps, for an uninterrupted period of many cycles, he would follow with ever more impetuous mental footsteps the bewildering paths of inventive speculation. In the midst of that dull void he would conceive the existence of many things; he would fill space with entities, psychical and even material.

For many æons the fear of ridicule had deterred him from breathing a word of all these phantasies to his more severe and calculating companion; for to William's cold and precise reason, that which existed was all that ever could exist; and stern philosophic argument had convinced him that space and darkness were everything which could ever possibly be designed or executed.

This was no grudging conservatism, nor prejudice against new things. No, he had worked the matter out in the light of pure reason and scientific argument, and he *knew*.

"William," said James, at length, impelled by an impulse which he could no longer restrain, yet with the detectable nervousness and hesitation of one who fears reproach or ridicule—"William, has it never crossed your mind that the surroundings of our existence are a little—that is, a trifle—monotonous and samey?"

He stopped suddenly, abashed, and fidgeted uncomfortably from foot to foot, as the keen eye of the other, wide with astonishment was fixed upon him.

"I fear I do not catch your meaning, James," at length replied the wiser spirit.

James flushed uncomfortably; but he had committed himself too far for further hesitation. "Might there not exist," he went on, though still nervously, "something beyond mere space and darkness?"

"Something beyond?" repeated the sage, "certainly not: that is impossible. Space and darkness, as Science and Reason conclusively prove, are the only conditions which



“‘Ah, just so,’ said William witheringly.”

can ever possibly exist. What phantasy is this for which you hanker? Give details.”

“Well—why could there not be worlds about?” asked James, bold in very desperation.

“Foolish boy!” replied the philosopher. “Do you think I have not often thought this thing out for myself? Were I to adduce the thousand and one scientific reasons which prove the impossibility of the existence of worlds, you could

not follow me. Tell me, whence would you fetch your materials with which to manufacture these worlds?"

James was silent. "How many worlds would you like to have, in your foolishness?" asked the sage.

"Well," said James humbly, "I was thinking of two—one of them all on fire, to give light to the other; and the other for working purposes."

"Ah, just so," said William witheringly. "Of course, it has never occurred to you that the two would dash together by mutual attraction and become one? How about that?"

"Well—I would have a whole lot of them, to keep one another in position—"

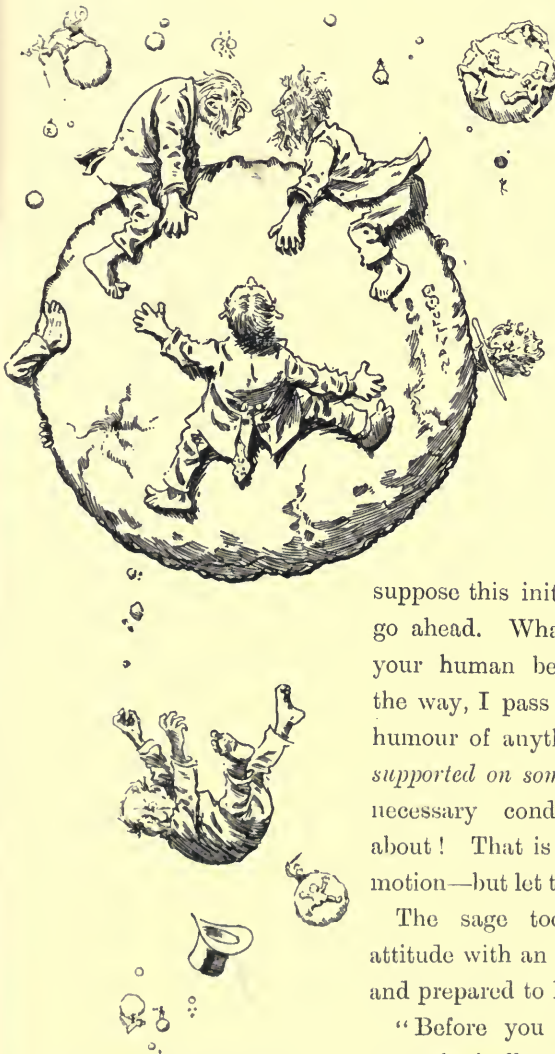
"Ah," said William, "and they would all dash together at a common centre, however many you had."

"Hum—that *is* a bother," said James disappointedly; "because I was going to put all manner of things on my worlds."

"As what?" asked the philosopher, with a crushing grin.

"Well, I thought of human beings among other things—when I say human beings I mean something alive and able to move about when supported on anything solid, such as a world; and endowed with a certain amount of reason, and able to express his thoughts, and subject to emotions and proclivities—mostly evil, of course, and—"

"Well now, look here," said William magnanimously, "let us suppose that you have got over all the insurmountable obstacles in the way of keeping your human beings alive; let us wildly take it for granted that they have not been crushed between your worlds, nor by the attraction of their own—that they can move upon its surface (which, of course, any attraction sufficient to keep them from tumbling



“They would fight and exterminate each other.”

off would inevitably prevent their doing)—that they are not shrivelled up by the heat generated by the friction of your large mass of material pressing towards its centre, not frozen, nor otherwise instantly destroyed (which they assuredly would be): let us

suppose this initial absurdity, and go ahead. What do you intend your human beings to do? By the way, I pass over the sublime humour of anything *having to be supported on something solid* as a necessary condition of moving about! That is a peculiar sort of motion—but let that pass. Well?”

The sage took up an easy attitude with an air of resignation, and prepared to listen.

“Before you begin,” said he, parenthetically, “I can tell you in a word what your beings would

do first—and last. They would fight and exterminate each other, and there would be an end of them.”

“No,” said James, “I believe they would increase in numbers and gradually become less savage, and begin to invent things—”

“Oh, *they* are to invent things as well as you. And I suppose the things they invented would invent other things, and so on?”

“No, they would invent inanimate objects, such as weapons.”

“Oh yes,” said William nastily, “I have no doubt they would invent weapons; *that* would help them towards extermination.”

“Yes, of course they would invent weapons first; but, as they grew less savage—”

“Hum—inventing weapons is a peculiar mode of making oneself less savage!”

“Why, the weapons, as they became more deadly and efficient, would get so capable of exterminating them that they would prove the actual means of civilizing and rendering them more humane—”

“What does ‘humane’ mean?”

“It is the same as human, that is, kind, sympathizing, benevolent, mild, compassionate, tender, merciful.”

“Oh, indeed!” said William; “pray go on.”

“By degrees their relations one with another would become more polished and pleasant; a stranger would not necessarily be a foe—”

“Hold hard a moment,” said the sage; “how many of these human beings do you propose to have in your world?—some dozens?”

"Many millions."

"*Millions!!* But are they all to be precisely alike, so that one could not be distinguished from another? If that were so, everything would be utter confusion."

"Of course. That would never do. Each must necessarily have his individuality."



"Varying the positions of the parts."

"That would be somewhat difficult when it came to *millions*," said William. "Of course, while you confined yourself to dozens, one might be spherical, another cubical, a third triangular, a fourth oval, and so forth—"

"Bless your soul!" said James. "My human beings are not to be in the form of geometrical figures! Each would have a body, two legs, two arms, a head, and so on."

"Oh! I see; and you will differentiate between them by varying the positions of these parts—now placing the head

at the end of one leg, now of the other ; now putting the legs and arms at the four corners, and the head in the middle—and so forth.”

“Not in the least. The positions of all parts would be relatively identical in all cases.”

“Now James, when you talk something distantly approaching reason I can bear with you (by an effort) ; but if you are going to talk such childish nonsense as this, I must leave you. You speak of *millions* of individuals whose general conformation is practically unvaried ; and yet each one is to be individually recognizable—how ?”



“He would have to carry a document.”

“ Why—why, by minor peculiarities, I suppose—”

“ ‘ Minor peculiarities ! ’ Then one of your beings would, on meeting another, have to institute a thorough and minute examination of him from end to end in order to discover one of these ‘ minor peculiarities ’ by which to identify him. He would hardly be able to *remember* the minor peculiarities of all the other millions of individuals, and would therefore have to carry a document whereon each of them was set down. Very practical ! Now let us work it out : This scroll of his has to contain, let us say, ten million different signs, with the name of the owner attached. Perhaps you will tell me how he is going to carry this scroll, which would certainly weigh some hundred-weights ? Then, granting he could carry it, he is to sit down and wade through ten millions of signs in order to identify his friend or enemy. This would occupy a considerable time.”

The younger spirit looked crestfallen.



“ Lists of identifying peculiarities set up.”

“ I must admit you rather have me there ! ” he said ruefully. “ I see there *would* be a difficulty about recognition. Perhaps there might be lists of identifying peculiarities set up at various points of the world, so that everybody could meet there and—”

“ Pooh ! ” said William, “ get on to some other absurdity. I can’t see what, save fighting, you would give your creatures to do.”

“ Oh, they would have to gain their living—to provide for themselves.”

“ Food ? ”

“ Yes, they could only keep alive by consuming periodically something which would nourish their frames.”

“ Whence would they obtain it ? ”

“ From the material of which their world was made.”

“ Oh, I see—your beings would gradually increase in numbers, and at the same time eat away the world they were clinging to, until, in course of time, there would be no world left to cling to at all ? But I suppose you would lengthen the thing out—they would only eat at intervals of an æon or so ? ”

“ No ; I was thinking of several times a day.”

The sage burst into a loud laugh, which rolled away for ever through space.

“ What ? Creatures whose frames would begin to dwindle away unless they ate *every few hours* ? Why, they would be able to think of nothing else ! Eating would take up all their time ! They would barely have leisure to kill one another between meals ! ”

“ No, there’s something in that,” said poor James.

“ Besides, you have invented beings possessing something

like intelligence. Have you provided that intelligence simply to be used in eating?"

"Oh no; but—"

"Well, they certainly wouldn't have a chance of using it for any other purpose. Are they to live to eat?"

"Oh no—only to eat to live."

"As soon as they had used their intelligence in eating, what is the next thing they would turn it to?"

"To—er—well, I suppose to finding something for the next meal," said poor James hopelessly.

"Precisely," said William. "You do not propose a very high standard of achievement for your beings! I presume all these inventions you talk about would have eating as their ultimate object? The best thing for them would be to invent something to render the necessity of eating less frequent; something which would do all the eating for them, and set them at liberty to attempt something else. What inventions were you thinking of?"

"Well—the electric telegraph, for instance; an apparatus to enable persons to talk to others long distances off."

"But your people wouldn't have time to talk to those at hand even—they would have to eat. By the way, what do you do with your beings when they die?"



"Eating would take
x up all their time."

"They become part of the world they lived on."

"Oh! and the others eat them? Ah, very nice! I really begin to like your human beings. Their tastes are so pleasant! Go on."

"Well, as they progressed in civilization they would make laws."

"What for?"

"To govern themselves by."

"Govern themselves by. But they could govern themselves without laws. What would they want laws for?"

"To prevent their doing wrong," said James.

"But if they were inclined to do right they would not need laws to keep them from doing wrong; while, if they were inclined to do wrong, they would not make such laws. Besides, the necessity of such laws seems to imply that the majority of your humans would have a leaning towards evil-doing?"

"Yes, that would be so."

"Then who would make, and enforce, those laws?"

"The better inclined minority."

"What horrid nonsense! The majority would not let them! No; obviously the majority would make the laws; and the majority being inclined towards evil, the laws would be for the propagation of evil-doing. If the majority of your humans were inclined to swindle their neighbours, the laws would be made in favour of swindlers."

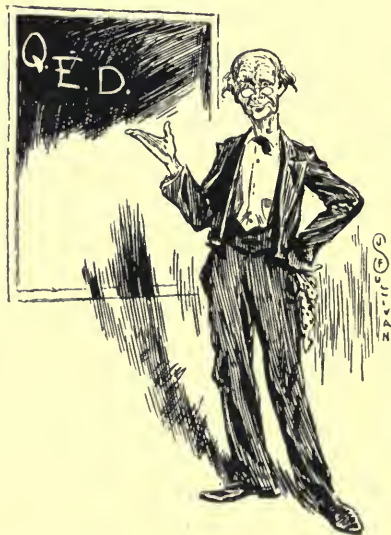
Poor James hastily ran over a few of the laws he had conceived, and expressed a wish to change the conversation.

"Look here, my poor boy," said William, rising, "don't muddle your head with any more of these preposterous plans. Science and Reason utterly confute the possibility

of such a world as you describe. To begin with, the world itself could not exist for five minutes; then your people couldn't live in it if it did; if they could live, they couldn't move; if they could live and move, they would not have a moment for anything but eating; they could not recognize or identify each other; and so on, and so on. The whole thing is a farrago of hopeless and impossible bosh, and couldn't hold water for a single instant. Science and Reason prove it!"

As the spirits ceased, we turned to our newspaper and read the following words:—

"*The North American Review* lately described the recent successful experiments carried on in the Far West of America to produce rain by explosives. The result was complete success. . . . This article was followed by a paper by Professor Newcombe, in which he demonstrates conclusively that it is absolutely impossible to make rain in any such way."



The End of War

THE two spirits William and James—whose previous argument touching the possibility of the existence of worlds it is the reader's duty to recollect—were again wandering through the desolation of unoccupied space, when James, the young and fanciful, suddenly once again broke the oppressive silence.

“William,” said he, “I have been thinking more about that system of creation of which I spoke.”

William chuckled a rumbling chuckle of unmannerly raillery, and said,—

“You have, of course, in thinking it over again, perceived the wild impracticability of the whole thing; and are about to unreservedly admit that neither universes, worlds, man, or anything else could possibly exist—”

“I have perceived nothing of the kind,” replied James, somewhat irritably. “But the phase of the subject which has just been occupying my mind is war—”

“Yes,” said William in his nasty way, “that assuredly *would* be the most prominent—nay, the engrossing—phase of any existence in which those phantastically imaginary creatures you call ‘human beings’ might take part. War—extermination—the end. Well?”

“Well, I admit the preponderance of war, but not the sequel you are pleased to suggest. I have dreamed the whole thing in its sequence. There would be war—war becoming ever more and more devastating—to a certain point—”



“Agreeing to kill each other with sharpened flints.”

“But,” interrupted William, “before you go on wasting valuable eternity with your speculations, let me just ask you one question. You will, I take it, at once admit that the predominant characteristics of these human beings of yours is—foolishness bordering on idiocy?”

“Well, ye—es,” said James, communing with himself.

“Ye—es. I see them universally agreeing to abolish all self-respect and establish a complicated system of mutual fraud which they will call ‘commerce.’ I see them heaping all their wealth upon howlers of drivelling comic songs, while allowing great writers to die of starvation. Ye—es, I admit the predominant characteristics.”

“Very well, then,” said William, “are these ‘human beings’ worth inventing?”

“Well—n—. Beshrew me, mustn’t I amuse myself with a fad if I like?” said James, feeling rathered cornered, and consequently angry. “Let me go on, while I remember my Vision of War. Well, first I seemed to see my human beings agreeing to kill each other with sharpened flints; this was slow work and not sufficiently sanguinary, so they set their brains (there, don’t sneer), their brains to work to devise something capable of shedding larger quantities of blood with more facility. You need not laugh at that, for blood would be most useful in enriching the earth from which, you must bear in mind, these creatures would obtain their sustenance. You deafen one with your unthinking laughter, William! Well, they seemed to find out a way of making weapons of metal. Soon after this I seemed to see them covering their bodies with metal to resist the weapons—”

“But, look here,” said William, “would it not have saved trouble, had you originally dreamed them as naturally coated with metal from birth?”

“No!” said James curtly, “the earth has to be enriched somehow. *Do* hold your tongue, and let me go on! I perceived their bodies coated with metal. Then, a little later, they began to perceive that the weapons needed

improvement in order to keep up the proper supply of blood to the soil ; and so they agreed to invent firearms which would pierce the metal casing. Then, again, in a little while I dreamed that these beings discarded the metal casing altogether—”



“ They agreed to invent firearms.”

“ Soil getting poor again ? ”

“ No, not in the least ; but it had become ineffectual as a protection against the firearms.”

“ What *very* curious creatures these of yours seem to be ! ” said William. “ One would really think that, instead of agreeing to kill themselves off like this, they would agree once for all to abolish the weapons and live ! ”

“ I am, I confess, somewhat puzzled about that,” said James thoughtfully. “ And the fact is, after long observation of their habits, I am not convinced that they *desire* to live. In fact, evidences point almost conclusively to the contrary. I am inclined to think that the earth they live upon is *the* one object of their devotion, for which, and to which, they delight to sacrifice themselves and everything else ; for I dreamed that they were always ready to sacrifice conscience and—”

“ What is that ? ” asked William. “ You have not spoken of their having that before.”

“ No ; I was not quite sure what it was. You see, I seemed to hear them continually talking about it as something very valuable—something that ought to fetch a long price ; and I fancy it must be an article of commerce. In fact, from what I can glean, it seems that, when the competition between, for instance, the manufacturers of any given nation has become very keen, they begin to part with their ‘ consciences ’—to put them up in the parcels of goods ; give them away with a pound of tea, as it were. And I dreamed that certain of the nations—for example, one called ‘ Great Britain,’ and others named ‘ Germany ’ and ‘ America ’—did a very large export trade in these articles. From this I concluded that the article must be a something to fall back upon when the natural resources of a nation—produce and industry—have given out. Let us take it, then, that ‘ conscience ’ is a highly prized article of commerce. Well, I say, I dreamed that they were always ready to sacrifice even this article to the soil : every one of them seemed eager to exchange the commodity for the smallest slice of earth ; and nations would do *anything* to obtain an

extra bit of the latter. In fact, there seemed to be a fairly definite standard of relative market value between blood, and conscience, and earth—perhaps a quart of the two former mixed, for a square foot of the latter ; or something of that kind.



“ A single human being could destroy a whole nation.”

“ But about war. Gradually, I dreamed, the firearms became more and more destructive ; while all the elements, and everything in existence, were pressed into the service of war ; and so absorbed were my human beings in the

perfecting of war that they invented a subsidiary state of affairs called 'Peace,' which, on referring to these creatures' dictionaries, I found to be 'An interval necessary to the effective preparation of war.' The nations were never altogether in their element during these intervals; and, of course, any protracted peace meant the gradual impoverishment of the soil for want of the fertilizer.

"Well, war seemed to grow ever more terrible; until it came to such a pass that a single human being could destroy a whole nation by simply pressing a small button with his finger. This rendered the thing *too* wholesale, for it was found that the supply of the fertilizer—(let us speak of it in future under this name, as it is so much less unpleasant)—began to exceed the requirements of the soil, and thus to be rather detrimental to production than otherwise. Then I fancied that all the nations—that is, all that was left of them—solemnly consulted about the matter; and I heard talk of a mighty power not long discovered, and then being gradually brought to perfection; and I saw all the nations devote the ensuing interval of peace to destroying their great and complicated machineries of war, which had required so much thought and labour to produce. The enormous guns, with the great cracks in them which had resulted from firing them once to try them, were placed in museums, never more to be used; the great ships which had all, in the course of their regular business, run upon rocks, began to be visited by curious sightseers who travelled to them on the flying machines which had been constructed as engines of war.

"Then I seemed to perceive, from the movements of bodies of human beings, that another war had broken out

and I perceived the armies mustering and going through their exercises ; but the whole circumstances and conditions appeared to be entirely changed.

“ There were no weapons—not even an officer carried a sword ; there was not a trumpet or a drum. When a regiment or a company had to be mustered, I perceived that a being went and stood, or sat, in utter silence at some



“ With great cracks in them.”

point or other ; and, after he had remained there a short space, others would approach him as if drawn to him, until the requisite number were collected. Then without a sound passing, or any sign being made, the mass of them would perform their evolutions ; but these evolutions differed entirely from any I had observed in all the periods preceding. Sometimes two files of men would be placed facing each

other, and would remain silent and motionless for a considerable time, one file gazing intently at the other; until at length one or other of the two files seemed to waver in its gaze, some of its members occasionally sinking to the ground as if oppressed by sleep; and there the affair would end. At other times whole regiments would be thus placed opposite to each other, with similar results.

“Then I dreamed what seemed to be private practice between the officers; two of them standing face to face in the same way, until one of them began to rub his eyes, or to sink down.

“And then I saw the armies come out from the two nations which were apparently at war, and camp opposite each other; but even now not a sign of any weapon or instrument of war! I was much surprised to see that many of the battalions were composed of women; and I was no less surprised to perceive no ambulance, nor any of those preparations for attending to the wounded which had been so conspicuous formerly. In fact, the whole of this part of my dream puzzled me so much that I paid particular attention to all the details. Early one morning strong coffee and other stimulants were served out to the men, who then proceeded to form into order of battle; that is to say, the contending hosts spread themselves out into two long lines, within a few feet of each other, and then deliberately sat down—entirely unarmed—and stared fixedly at one another. As soon as they had settled themselves in this way, the generals’ staffs on either side took up their positions on rising ground.

“Then I waited expectantly for the slaughter to commence, but neither side moved a muscle. Presently,

however, I perceived something wrong with the left wing of one of the armies ; for the soldiers began to sink down to the ground by twos and threes, while others averted their gaze from their opponents, or began rubbing their eyes with their fists. As soon as all this was perceived, there issued suddenly from behind a copse, after the manner of cavalry, a great troupe of mummers, jugglers, singers, and others of



“ Many of the battalions were composed of women.”

that kind, among whom were many women ; and these filing in between that wavering left wing and their opponents, began to act stage plays, grimace, sing songs, and perform conjuring feats, apparently with a view to divert the attention of the enemy from the battle. And, indeed, they appeared to succeed in so doing to such an extent that the left

wing had opportunity to recover somewhat and put on a better front ; on seeing which the enemy seemed to again fix their gaze more steadily upon them, ignoring the mummies ; so that in a short time nearly the whole of the left wing had sunk down to the ground ; and from its ranks there went up a mighty sound as of snoring.

“ Meanwhile, what was apparently a picked reserve, composed of women—which had been hovering in the rear—now came hurriedly forward and sat down in front of the worsted left wing, and fixed their gaze so unblinkingly upon the enemy’s right that almost in no time these were snoring to a man, even more loudly than their opponents. The enemy now began to show signs of wavering all along the line, these signs becoming more pronounced as the picked corps, having conquered the enemy’s right wing, were now free to direct their attack to other parts of his line.

“ The fight continued, however, well into the night ; the whole field of action being brilliantly illuminated, as soon as dusk set in, by electric lights. About midnight the enemy’s centre completely gave way ; and the picked corps, marching in column through the gap, wheeled and sat down behind his right wing which was now exposed to a double fire before and behind, and very soon surrendered at discretion.

“ The survivors, now rallying at different points of the field, marched back to camp ; making way for the several army service corps, the members of which went hither and thither among the sleeping, covering them with cloaks, and making them as comfortable as possible.

“ I explored the field of battle early in the morning and at first the thunder of the snoring so overpowered me that I felt quite dizzy and bewildered ; but I became used to it.

The sight was a very curious one : on all hands the field was littered with the victims of the battle, lying singly, or where the fight had been most severe—in heaps. Some lay upon their backs, others upon their noses ; some again were curled up into extraordinary attitudes, brought about by their struggles to keep awake. I was afterwards informed that a sharpshooter had effected an entrance into the tent of the general of the defeated army early in the battle and succeeded in putting him to sleep, this being one of the causes of that side's losing the day."

" Ah, yes. This all seems dreadful nonsense—dreadful ! " remarked William complacently. " May I ask by what extraordinary power one of your armies conquered the other in that way ? "

" By means of hypnotism," replied James. " A power discovered and utilized by my human beings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—having also been discovered and utilized some five thousand years previously, and several times before that. It would be the power exercised by one mind over another, by superior force of will—"

" Oh, yes ! I think I recollect your saying that your human beings were to possess minds ; though their doings, subsequently described, had caused me to forget it. But how beings like those without mind enough to control their own actions with a decent amount of intelligence, could possibly control the minds of others—well ! If, with only their own actions to control they never do anything more intelligent than eat and kill each other, *what* kind of result would be arrived at when they had to look after the actions of others too ? I suppose your conquered nation would become the slaves of your conquering nation, eh ? "

“ Exactly. They would no longer have any will of their own.”

“ Hum! Well, seeing what your puppets are engaged in doing when they *have* a will of their own, that would be a change for the better, certainly. But, I say, James, look



here, how about the fertilizer? There would be no bloodshed, and the soil would become —”

“ Oh,” said James, “ at this time artificial chemical fertilizers will be introduced.”

“ I see. But wouldn't your world very soon get overcrowded, so that it couldn't possibly support its inhabitants?”

“It would,” said James. “That is the very consummation which my human beings would most desire and yearn for. In the later ages, in countries already too full to support their inhabitants, the greatest honour would be paid to those citizens bringing up the largest families, particularly when those families must inevitably be chargeable to the parish. In proportion to the increase of the birth-rate in such countries would be the wildness of the inhabitants’ rejoicings.”

“Why, first your human beings are mad to reduce their limited numbers by slaughter; and then as soon as the world is getting over-populated, they are mad to increase their numbers to suffocation and starvation point!”

“Ye—es,” said James. “I must confess they have strange ways.”

“Strange w—! Well, that’s putting it mildly. James, take my word for it; it’s a remarkably good thing that these human beings of yours, and these worlds of yours, could never by any possibility exist!”

MOOZEBY

IT was just the day for a picnic—fine and balmy, and discounted by no probability of rain and hurricane; in fact, we had had a long spell of settled weather—nearly a day and a half—so we were all in good spirits.

We had selected a beautiful landing-place on the bank of the Thames, and had the additional advantage of the shadow of a large notice-board—a board declaring the land, river, air, sky, clouds, and other articles around and above to be the private property of someone or other, and warning strangers not to land, fish, breathe, exist, or otherwise trespass near the spot. The shadow of this board served nicely to keep the rays of the sun from the butter and champagne. We only regretted that Moozeby had not been able to join us.

We were preparing to sit down to our repast when Pinniger, looking toward the “table,” expressed a fear that a mist was rising from the ground just at that spot. It really seemed so, although the place we had chosen for laying the cloth on had been selected on account of its apparent dryness. Yet there *was* a small patch of mist,

rapidly increasing in density ; so, deciding that there must be a small morass just there, we prepared to move the eatables to another place.

Pinniger thereupon stretched forth his hand to seize the dish of lobsters, and withdrew it with a strange expression of face ; he examined his hand : “ It’s the densest mist *I* ever came across ! ” he muttered ; “ I can *feel* it—feels like cotton-wool ! ”

Then Maud Wimble—Pinniger’s affianced—tried to reach the pie, and drew back *her* hand with a little shriek. “ What is it ? ” she cried in a scared way ; “ I don’t like it ! I can hardly get my hand through it ! Look, look ! It seems to have a shape ! ”

We had turned green now, and were standing in a ring, staring open-mouthed at the patch of fog. It *did* seem to have a shape certainly.

Joe Button, who was a stolid heavy fellow without any nerves, had another try at it ; he tried to get at the butter, and did succeed in getting the point of a finger some little way in, but drew it back hastily and turned green like the rest of us ; for he and we could have sworn that we heard a sort of far-off voice crying, from the midst of that fog : “ Here I say ! A joke’s a joke—that hurts ! ”

Utterly paralyzed, we stood watching that lump of fog. It was momentarily becoming more opaque, and more and more of the form of a man ; then the form became rapidly clearer and clearer—until at length there sat Moozeby, solid and alive, on the viands.

“ It’s all right—don’t be alarmed, any of you,” panted Moozeby, wiping his brow as if after some great exertion ; “ there’s nothing supernatural—I’ve only precipitated

myself—been taking lessons in it. But, by Jove, where *have* I landed? Why—oh, I say! I'm awfully sorry!"

With this he got up from the provisions, the greater part of which were ruined; he had been sitting on the pie, the butter, the salad, the coffee-cream, the salmon, and the tarts. We upbraided him wildly.



“There sat Moozeby—on the viands.”

“I say, I'm awfully sorry!” he said humbly, “*awfully* sorry. The fact is, it's very difficult to aim properly when you're a beginner. You see, it's this way—when you're distributed in the air in the form of elements, it affects the sight to a great extent; and you really cannot see exactly where you *are* focussing yourself. You know, I could distinguish the group of you here in a vague way, and recognize you by your voices; but I was under the impression that I was

precipitating myself on that tree-stump there, see? I really hadn't the faintest idea I was among the eatables—wouldn't have played a trick like that for the world! You know me."

We did know him for a good fellow, with a mind above jokes of that sort; so we forgave him.

"But, now, what the dickens are we going to do for grub?" we said.



"A little patch of mist appeared over Wortleworth's head."

"I'll tell you what," said Moozeby, "I'll take the Canadian, and paddle to Sonning, and get something. Won't be ten min—"

"I say, Bob, if you can precipitate yourself, what's to prevent you trying your hand at other things—raised pies and things?"

"Gad, I never thought of that!" exclaimed Moozeby.

"I wouldn't eat such nasty, unwholesome, supernatural

things, for one!" said Mrs. Wimbledon, shuddering; and we all had some such feeling.

"Well, anyhow, it won't do any harm to try. Tell you what, I'll try on a sandwich, and taste it myself," said Moozeby. "Just help me wish for it, all you fellows; it might be an assistance."

Fixing his eyes steadfastly on the top of Wortleworth's head, so that his attention should not wander, Moozeby stood perfectly still, grunting at intervals as if engaged in a tiring effort. In a few moments a little patch of mist appeared over Wortleworth's head; and, in another few moments, there lay a freshly-cut sandwich right on the bald patch.

"Oh, I beg pardon—didn't mean it to come there!" exclaimed Moozeby. He took the sandwich: we all smelt it suspiciously; and Moozeby nibbled a little corner of it.

"Upon my word, it isn't half bad!" he said. "It's ham—not American, I'll swear. It's remarkably good. I'll finish it, and chance it."

"Precipitate a dish of 'em, Bob; it won't be any bigger effort to do a whole dish than a single one, will it?"

He did it. We each took one, very nervously and delicately—with the exception of Mrs. Wimbledon—and turned it over, and smelt it. Each sandwich was beautifully buttered and seasoned, and looked most tempting. A notion occurred to us: we offered one to Tim, the Irish terrier; and *he* swallowed it unhesitatingly, and did not die in a paroxysm, or catch fire; on the contrary, he licked his lips. We nibbled a corner; we ate those sandwiches, with the exception of Mrs. Wimbledon who declared it was

wicked and a "tempting of Providence" (whatever that may be), and shuddered again.

"Go it, Bob, old man!" we cried in chorus. "Let's have some nice things—galantines, and so on."



"Mrs. Wimbledon shuddered."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Moozeby, "let's make out a list—a race-hamper list—before I go to work. It'll be one effort for the lot."

"Yes, better order 'em all at once—"

"Ssh! Don't speak of it as 'ordering,' old chap. Mrs. Besant wouldn't like it if she heard; and there's no knowing if she does," said Moozeby.

The affair was a great success. We laid out a clean white cloth on the burdens of the boat, and Moozeby precipitated on to it a very choice and varied collation. There were

minor blunders: he omitted to precipitate a dish for the mayonnaise. The wine was excellent—not at all like any one gets from a wine merchant; and the cigars had not that aroma of guano characterizing those we obtain from Havana.

Beyond this, the new way of providing things was remarkably economical; and we all decided to lay in a large stock of wine for home use in that way. It is very strange to reflect that this useful power, exercised with so great facility by H. P. B. and our friend Moozeby, should have been so long neglected by civilized men! The more one thinks upon it the stranger it seems.

Presently it came on to rain, and Moozeby precipitated umbrellas and waterproofs. He was invaluable: no picnic is complete without a Moozeby. Nevertheless, these articles were not such a complete success as the viands; some of them hovered an unreasonable time in a nebulous condition, and one umbrella really only became solid in parts, and let the rain through the misty portions on to Pinniger and his lady; but we arrived at the station in good spirits—to find our last train gone!

On inquiry, we discovered that we could, by waiting an hour and twenty minutes, get home towards morning by changing at Clapham Junction, Willesden, and Loughborough Park. We were in dismay, when Pinniger was struck with a thought,—

“Why couldn’t you precipitate a special train, Bob?” he said to Moozeby.

Poor Moozeby looked fagged out, and said, “Fact is, I don’t feel over fresh after precipitating all those other things. It’s a bit of a strain; and a train’s a big thing to

undertake late in the day—the engine alone will take a lot out of me ; but I'll do my best."

Accordingly poor Moozeby, after a sip of brandy, went and fixed his eyes steadily on the line ; while we all stood round, staring eagerly at the same point. The station-master, thinking something must be wrong, came up and



“ The last train gone ! ”

asked if we had lost anything. “ Sh ! ” whispered Pinniger hoarsely ; “ don't distract his attention—you'll spoil it.”

So the station-master and the porters, and the paper-boy silently joined the group, and stared at the line too. A quarter of an hour elapsed ; and then a grey vapour began to gather on the line, wavering uncertainly ; for fully another twenty minutes it wavered and varied in density ; and then the station-master began to grow anxious.

“Beg pardon—don’t want to spoil the experiment, whatever it may be,” he whispered. “But it won’t do to interfere with the line in any way—it’s against all rules.”

It became obvious that we must let the station-master into it; to attempt to work a thing on so large a scale without taking him into the affair seemed positively rude; besides which, he might be able to assist Moozeby with hints as to the proper construction of a train. So we explained the matter to him.

The station-master shook his head decisively, and said it was against rules for strangers to place trains on the line; it was obviously to the common danger, particularly as the up express was due in twelve minutes.

This was serious; we advised Moozeby to run his nebula on to a siding out of danger, and go on with it there—if we could persuade the station-master to sanction it.

But Moozeby was very tired, and got flurried over it; he found that the half-solid train would not move, the engine not yet having arrived at a working condition; so he hastily attempted to precipitate a horse to drag it into the siding; but the horse behaved in a foolish manner too, and finally took form with only three legs, one of *them* being filmy. Our nervousness and excitement grew intense—the express was signalled as having passed a point three miles away, and would be upon us almost immediately: in our despair we jumped down on the line, and put our shoulders to such half-solid portions of Moozeby’s train as we could find—but our exertions only made a jumbled mass of it, owing to the nebulous parts giving way; the rumble of the approaching express grew momentarily louder; the station-master and the porters and the paper-boy shrieked to us to come

off the line ; we scrambled madly on to the platform, yelling to Moozeby to dissolve his train as sharp as he could ; Moozeby gasped and made one mighty effort ; the express came thundering through the arch a hundred yards away ; the station-master and porters and paper-boy were nearly



“ The express dashed by.”

mad, and tried frantically to poke away the lumps of Moozeby’s train with some poles.

The express dashed by, scattering the pieces of train in all directions ; and whirled away out of sight.

Lumps of the scattered train were falling about us in every direction, some of them upon our heads ; but they were so light that an umbrella easily kept them off ; and we breathed again, for the express had escaped undamaged.

The anger of the station-master was terrible, and he was at first about to give us all in charge ; but we soothed him after a time, and Moozeby precipitated a diamond scarf-pin into his tie ; and we shook hands with him, and trudged off towards the village to get beds.

Our path lay by the side of the line ; and, when about a quarter of a mile from the station, we came upon a nice quiet siding, and Pinniger glanced at Moozeby.

“ All right,” said Moozeby, who had refreshed himself after his recent strain with half a bottle of champagne and the breast of a fowl ; “ I don’t feel so tired as I did, and I fancy I might get on better now. I was flurried before.”

This time he went to work more methodically. We all sat down on the waterproofs and the men smoked, while Moozeby commenced at the engine, to make sure of that at any rate. We had decided to limit ourselves to an engine and one carriage, to save Moozeby as much as possible.

But Moozeby wasted time and strength to begin with : for, knowing but little about engines, he half-precipitated a pumping engine, having, as Pinniger remarked, probably only ordered “ an engine,” without stating on the order-form the kind of engine required.

However, Moozeby tried again ; and presently we had the consolation of seeing a magnificent compound, leading-bogie, four-coupled locomotive gradually assuming shape ; Moozeby was a little irritated on seeing this, as such a powerful engine was a waste of his strength, but he went on with it ; and at length he declared it finished.

Still it didn’t look quite right—there were parts through which you could pass the hand, which we were all convinced

was not the case in an ordinary manufactured engine—however, we were glad to get anything.

Then Moozeby went to work at the carriage, but that came very, very slowly, for he was getting exhausted; and when it did appear he did not seem able to consolidate it properly. It would not set. There it was, however; and Thripling stepped into it: but the next moment we heard



“ An engine-driver at last.”

angry words coming from underneath it; and it turned out that Thripling had fallen through a part of the floor, which had not set, on to the permanent way.

Then Moozeby got in and finished the precipitation of the floor of one compartment, and we all crowded into that; but presently Maud Wimble felt the part she was on getting nebulous again, and *she* found herself standing on the

ground with her head and shoulders in the carriage. However, Moozeby patched it up again for the time.

Then we remembered that none of us could drive an engine, and poor Moozeby had to collect himself once more to precipitate a driver: and here again he forgot to describe the particular kind of driver; owing to which he found he had precipitated a pig-driver, who was helplessly intoxicated into the bargain; but he did precipitate an engine-driver at last, who set fairly well, except part of one leg which remained cloudy, so that the man had to move about by hopping.

Then we finally got in and waited breathlessly for the train to move. It *did* move! Very slowly, strangely, and creakily, showing that there was *something* wrong; however, that did not matter so long as we could get home somehow. We requested the driver not to drive fast and recklessly; and he replied that he was not likely to, with parts of the boiler like flannel, and requiring to be tied round with string to prevent bursting.

That train never set properly; every two or three minutes some part or other of it would become nebulous again, the whole requiring incessant attention on the part of Moozeby, who was getting thoroughly knocked up, and was losing his power.

Once the driver's body and legs became a cloud; and he called out to us that he couldn't undertake to drive in that condition; then the end of the carriage vanished suddenly into air, letting down a row of us on to the permanent way, and bruising us considerably. We were anything but comfortable, for we had to keep a very sharp look-out for trains which frequently came by; and on these occasions

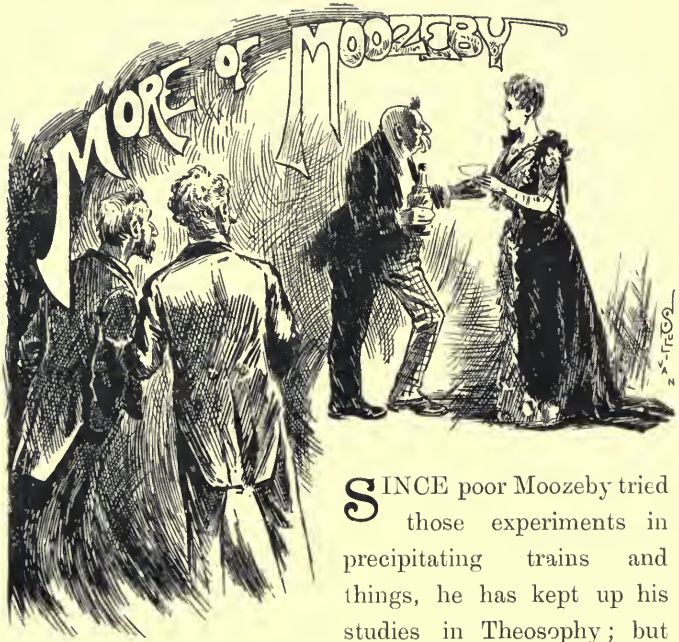
Moozeby would have to make a wild effort and precipitate, in all haste, a siding for us to run on to, until the other train had passed.

At length Moozeby could be kept awake no longer, in spite of all we could do by pinching and running pins into him ; and the carriage, engine, and driver suddenly became soft—nebulous—air ; leaving us on the permanent way, many miles from London, at two in the morning.

We were dreadfully angry with poor Moozeby at the time—unreasonably so, when one considers how much he had done for us ; for after all said and done Moozeby is a very good fellow at heart, and his accomplishment remarkably useful at times ; particularly when he is fresh and his precipitations will set properly.

It is foolish to attempt such a thing as a train, when one is tired ; and, besides, it brings discredit on Theosophy and makes the uninitiated incredulous about it.





SINCE poor Moozeby tried those experiments in precipitating trains and things, he has kept up his studies in Theosophy; but the results have not been at all encouraging.

We were all at Mrs. Moozeby's reception; and we all knew one another more or less, with the exception of one man who was a stranger to us all. We could not help noticing him; for his appearance and manner, besides being new to us all, were rather remarkable.

"Who's that old boy?" said Pinniger to Thripling. "I never saw such a queer fish in my life. He seems to move about so awkwardly, as if he hadn't the proper use of his limbs."

"I fancy it's acute rheumatism, or St. Vitus's dance, or something of that sort," said Thripling. "I've noticed it myself. He's a genial sort of old boy though, apparently;

patted me on the back just now, and said he hoped I was enjoying myself! I take it he must be one of Mrs. M.'s brothers—fancy she did tell me once, now I come to think of it, that she had a matter of a brother or two in Australia. He must be some relation, or he would hardly make himself quite so much at home, would he?"

"Tell you what," said Pinniger presently, "that old fellow is a regular study. The way he gets about is really lovely—like a crab on crutches. And his voice is so queer; every now and then it breaks and becomes a squeak, and at other times he seems to be trying to imitate Moozeby; in fact, now I come to think of it, his accent is very much like Moozeby's. I have it—he's a relation of Moozeby's, not Mrs. M.'s; there is a sort of family likeness all round. Never heard that Moozeby had a brother, but he may be a first cousin or something."

At this moment Mrs. Moozeby came up and whispered to Pinniger, "Do you know who that gentleman is? I thought he must be a friend of Mrs. Wimbledon's; but she says she never saw him before in her life. Who brought him? And I wonder why they didn't introduce him to me, or anything?"

Pinniger and Thripling shook their heads hopelessly.

"I don't at all like his manners!" continued Mrs. Moozeby. "He goes about as if my house belonged to him, and offers people wine and things! Just now, I do believe, he went down into the cellar and fetched up more champagne; and he addresses me as 'My dear' and 'My love'! I do wish my husband would come home! Look! look! He has actually had the impertinence to go up and fetch baby out of bed! I *won't* have it! It's *too* much! I don't

care who brought him, I shall go and ask him what he means by it all!"

"It's all right, my love," said the stranger, tossing the baby up. "I'm sure baby's had a good sleep, and he wants to see the company. Don't you, Toddlums?"

"Actually knows baby's pet name!" exclaimed Mrs. Moozeby. "I have not the pleasure of knowing who you



"Kitchee! Kitchee!"

are, sir; but I consider that you are taking very great liberties in my house, and I must ask you to behave yourself if you remain here. Pray, who brought you here?"

The stranger stared a little at this speech, and then broke into a laugh of great enjoyment, though with something of puzzlement in it.

"Kitchee! kitchee!" he said between his chuckles.

"Mummy's funny, isn't she, Toddlums? Funny, wunny, wee! Fun-ny, wun-ny, widdle-de, wee!"

The infant seemed to enjoy the joke intensely, and laid a slobbery finger on the stranger's nose; but Mrs. Moozeby indignantly snatched it away, and hurried with it upstairs, exclaiming at every step, "Of all the impertinence!" "To think of it!" "Well!"

"Very extraordinary!" exclaimed the stranger. "What in the name of heaven can have put her out? Never saw

her in such a tantrum." And he rushed upstairs after her : then there came a scream from above ; and we hurried up, to find Mrs. M. at bay in a corner (with the baby in a safe position behind her), stamping her foot at the stranger and pouring forth volumes of wild indignation.



“ Clutching at his hair.”

The stranger stood in the middle of the room scratching his head in a perplexed way, and occasionally exclaiming, “ My love ! ” and “ Tut, tut ! ”

“ Gad ! ” said Pinniger, “ mad ! Better send for a policeman.”

“I do believe she *is* mad,” said the stranger. “But I don’t think a policeman would know what to do. Aren’t burnt feathers, or smelling salts, or arnica, or something like that, good for this sort of thing?”

“Oh, *why* doesn’t Mr. Moozeby come home?” cried Mrs. M., beating an angry tattoo with her shoe.

The stranger gazed at us and shook his head. “Mad!” he murmured; then he said, “My love, don’t you know me?”

“No,” cried Mrs. Moozeby, “I do not; and what is more, whoever had the impertinence to bring you here shall never enter this house again!”

“I do hope she won’t take to tearing baby limb from limb,” said the stranger nervously; “I think I had better try to get it away. If she doesn’t know *me*—her husband—she’ll be fancying baby is a rat, or a blackbeetle, or something! Kitchee, kitchee. Hang it—you fellows don’t seem to know me either! What’s come to me? I do believe there’s a something about me that—which—that isn’t—”

He rushed to the cheval glass, gazed at himself a moment, then sank on the floor with his hands clutching at his hair.

“I’ve muddled it somehow!” he whispered to himself.

“It’s all right,” said Pinniger, soothingly, advancing with a Japanese fan he had hastily snatched up, and waving it gently before the stranger, to amuse and quiet him. “There’s a nice cab coming to fetch you, and a man with nice bright buttons all down his coat. So nice! Be here in a minute, if you sit nice and still.”

“Pinniger, my dear fellow, don’t!” said the stranger. “Can’t you see I’m—no, I suppose you can’t; but I *am*—Moozeby. I’ve been precipitating myself, and somehow

muddled it. You see, I was anxious to get home here quickly from the City so as to receive the people; but I missed my train, so I found a nice quiet spot in the Temple Gardens and elementalized myself, so that I might re-precipitate myself here at once; but somehow (I fancy I was thinking of a business acquaintance whom I had just left at



“ Her harrowed feelings found relief.”

the bottom of Ludgate Hill) I muddled it, and mixed myself up somehow; and I seem to have come out something like him here and there. You see—yes—he has a little bit of hair right in the middle of his forehead, and here it is; and this is his heavy moustache; and his legs are much longer than mine, and I seem to have one of his and one of my

own, and two different kinds of boots, too. Dear, dear! But look here, this mole at the back of my neck, that *is* mine. Look, my love, see? Mole! It's all right. I must really be chiefly myself, speaking in a general way and on broad lines, while I have that mole. Where that mole is *I* am; because they always used to distinguish me, as a baby, from other babies of the same size, by means of that mole. Yes, here it is; the large one, with the little tiny one by the side of it, for luck."

Mrs. Moozeby at length persuaded herself to approach him, and examine the mole; then her harrowed feelings found relief in sobs.

"I wish you had never seen those hateful Mahatma books, 'Hysteric Buddhism,' and the rest of them!" she said. "As if you had not quite enough irritating habits before, Robert! And now there's always this precipitating business going on; and I always told you it was bad for your health, especially your digestion, which was always delicate, besides being wicked and flying in the face of Providence! And *now* just see what you've done—mixed yourself up like this so that nobody can recognize you; and a nice job for Dr. Coddles to get you right again! And then that hateful moustache—very nice to be set against one's meals by festoons of soup and mayonnaise hanging to it! You'll have the kindness, at least, to have *that* off at once."

"I—really, my dear, I hardly like to. The fact is, I don't feel as if it were altogether my own property. You see, if I returned the other parts to Mownde—that's the business acquaintance, my dear—without the moustache, he mightn't altogether like—but, then, after all, I suppose this one is only a duplicate of his, and he's all right and

complete as it is, and knows nothing about it. Oh, dear, it is puzzling ; I don't quite understand all the bearings of the thing yet—”

“No,” said Mrs. Moozeby. “And it will come to having to keep an inventory of yourself, and go through it every morning to see if you are all there ; a nice waste of time, and pretty late it will make you for town ! Besides, the untidiness of leaving pieces of yourself all about in different places ! I'm sure George and Mary have quite enough work as it is, folding up your clothes that you throw all over the place ; and then what a nice example for baby to grow up with before its eyes ! How can you expect the servants to be tidy, and put things away, with you for ever asking where your legs are, or whether anyone has seen your nose ? I'm sure if these hateful Mahatmas had to manage a house themselves, they would



“ ‘Where is my leg ? Has anybody seen my nose ? ’ ”

have thought twice before inventing this detestable nonsense ! ”

Altogether that reception of Mrs. Moozeby's was a failure, and we all left early ; for we could not feel that Moozeby, in his existing state, was a proper substitute for himself ; and it was difficult to regard him as our host. It is true that the poor fellow did his very best to pull himself together and try to make us at home ; he came down and tried to get up some *tableaux vivants*, but we could perceive that he was tired and out of sorts—in fact, he experienced a great deal of pain in the leg which was not one of his own, and came to the conclusion that that business acquaintance of his must suffer badly from gout or rheumatism, and we thought it would be a relief to him if we all went away.

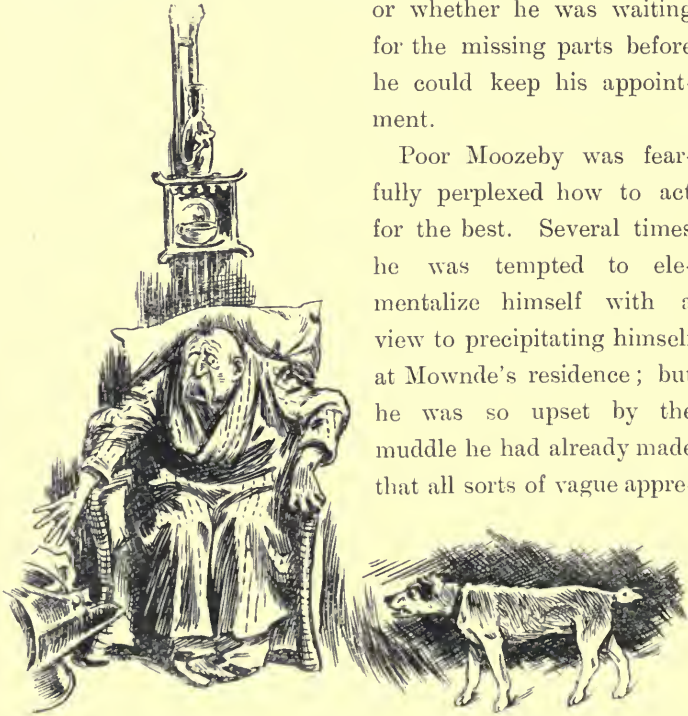
Next day, being rather anxious about poor Moozeby, I called for Pinniger ; and we went together to see how he was getting on. We found him at home as we had expected ; for, as he said, it would not be of much use to go to town, as neither the clerks nor anyone else would recognize him ; besides which, he had a morbid sensitiveness about venturing out and showing himself, being jerky and spasmodic in his movements in consequence of a difficulty in working the parts which were not his own, and which required practice to get used to.

He was very miserable, poor fellow ; among other things he had developed a violent cold in his nose—or rather, in his business acquaintance's nose. He recollected having noticed Mownde standing in a violent draught in town, and having warned him against taking cold ; and evidently he *had* taken cold. Then there was another thing—Moozeby's right hand, which was Mownde's, would keep taking out his

watch and holding it up to be looked at, which convinced Moozeby that Mownde had some important engagement that morning; and Moozeby's misery was increased by the uncertainty whether Mownde was really complete in himself

or whether he was waiting for the missing parts before he could keep his appointment.

Poor Moozeby was fearfully perplexed how to act for the best. Several times he was tempted to elementalize himself with a view to precipitating himself at Mownde's residence; but he was so upset by the muddle he had already made that all sorts of vague appre-



“ Moozeby and his fox-terrier.”

hensions held him back, one of them being that he might lose Mownde's pieces irrecoverably on the way, thus doing irreparable harm.

The worst of it was, Moozeby's fox-terrier *would* spend his whole time in walking round and round Moozeby on the

tips of his paws, and with his legs rigid like those of an automaton, and growling; and the possibility of his deciding on a bite was increased by Mownde's intense aversion to dogs, which caused Moozeby's right hand (in the intervals of taking out the watch) to seize all sorts of objects with the purpose of flinging them at the dog. As this would be absolutely certain to precipitate the threatened attack, Moozeby was forced to keep incessantly on the watch for the vagaries of that hand, which would occasionally (being very quick) seize a lump of coal or something while Moozeby's eye was turned away, and all but succeed in hurling it. Then that hand of Mownde's had a nasty twitch in it—some sort of paralysis—and would, every now and then, pinch Moozeby's ear, or pull his whiskers, causing him to grunt with pain. At length he settled matters for the time by sitting on that hand; and presently the dog went to sleep.

Several weeks passed before poor Moozeby could pluck up courage to attempt to set things right by a further experiment in elementalizing himself; but, what with the pressure put upon him by Mrs. Moozeby (who declared her determination to go and live with her mother if he intended to continue going about *that* guy), and the general unsatisfactory state of the case, he at length braced up his nerves to the attempt. That dog resented the operations from the commencement, and Pinniger had to hold him back; and Mrs. Moozeby had insisted on having Dr. Coddles present in case of accidents.

The poor fellow could not concentrate his mind on the operation—a most essential condition of success. His thoughts *would* wander to the objects he saw; and at the

first try he re-precipitated himself fairly all right, with the exception of the right leg, which was the leg of a table—a *facsimile* of those supporting the dining-table in front of him. Then, while he was trying to concentrate his thoughts on that leg, the rest of him grew nebulous, and faded right away; and we feared the worst. But his voice, apparently



“The leg of a table.”

from the centre of the earth, murmured: “All right, you fellows, I’m all here in the form of air; only I wish you would put a newspaper or something in front of the fire to prevent some of me being drawn up the chimney by the draught.”

We waited breathlessly for a quarter of an hour, then we heard Moozeby’s voice saying: “I say, just get down that

book, 'Every man his own Mahatma.' I think it's in that little bookcase by the window. That's it. Now, just turn to page 392, where it tells you how to unravel your elements when you've got 'em in a tangle. Thanks."

More suspense, and then a condensing nebula; and



"A very despondent state."

finally the form of Moozeby sitting on the mantelpiece. It was Moozeby this time, but with one strange—very strange—peculiarity; he had one black-and-tan ear like the terrier!

Mrs. Moozeby was dreadfully upset by that ear; and

poor M., with a sigh of despair, offered to try again : but his wife put her foot down once and for all, and absolutely forbade any more of the nonsense.

“ We shall have you turning out next,” she said angrily, speaking of him as if he were a blancmange, “ with the door-knob for a nose, or something of that sort, which would show more ! No, you must brush your hair down over that ear, and make the best of it, and it serves you right ! ”

And we left poor Moozeby in a very despondent state, with his black-and-tan ear drooping, ruefully watching Mrs. M., who was employed in burning his collection of Theosophical pamphlets on the fire ; while the terrier, who had already detected that ear, sat with one bright eye threateningly fixed upon it, making up his mind.



THE incidents of the following story occurred at a very remote age anterior to the European glacial epoch; and, therefore, bear no sort of analogy to anything which could possibly take place in our times.

There once lived a very affable gentleman whose eye was exceedingly bright and knowing; and the grasp of his hand was hearty and effusive, so that he was most pleasant to shake hands with; and many persons would make long journeys across the deserts and the oceans to have their

hands shaken by him, feeling much delight and satisfaction at it. These would sit down before him—him that had the eye that was so bright and knowing—and would hold out their hands to be shaken; and he of the bright eye was so

affable that he would by no means make any charge, either great or small, for shaking their hands, but would shake them gratis, even for nothing.

And this affable person, whose eye was knowing, would converse with all comers upon the most pleasant and attractive subjects, and this at any hour of the day or night which these persons might choose; nor would he ever refuse to talk upon subjects, either this subject or that, whichever might be the more pleasant; and for this conversing also would he make no charge, either great or small; and this thing greatly pleased and delighted his hearers.

Also he would exchange with them the most pleasant items of news that might be found in the daily papers; making this communion the more enjoyable by repeating to them the jokes from the comic papers, even the best jokes they contained.

Also he would ask after the health of their wives and families, and even of their cousins and distant relations; never churlishly refusing to inquire of the health of any relation, however distant; and for all this, too, did he make no charge, even the smallest charge.

But he who shall say that these things were all the pleasant things he did, shall say falsely and otherwise than the truth; for he did other things: he would make little feasts for those he knew, and the feasts were of chicken and champagne; and they that partook of his chicken and champagne were comforted, for they knew there would be no charge; therefore did they consume freely until their waistcoats were too tight for comfort; even as those do who know there is nothing to pay. So when those that knew

him went away from sitting in front of him, they would say one to another, with great satisfaction and joy, "He shook my hand seven times, and asked after the health of my great aunt"; or, "He gave me much chicken that was tender, and much sweet champagne, even too much," and they rejoiced, patting their digestions.

And there lived at this time another person who was quiet, and had a small professional business in a back street. And this party did not go forth of a morning to ask of the health of the wives and families of all he met; neither did he give little feasts which were of chicken and champagne. And his business was poor and of no account. Let us not talk of him.

And the affability of him that had the bright eye was large and liberal; so much that he would never say, concerning an influential person: "Behold, this is an influential person; therefore I will not shake his hand, neither will I give him little feasts of chicken and champagne, nor ask of the health of his wife and family."

And he would straightway treat the influential person as one would wish to be treated; asking after all his relations, even to the most distant, and even throwing in the relations of his wife; and he would give to him also chickens and champagne, the same as the others; yes, even more so.

And furthermore, he that had the bright eye would say of them that wrote puffs in the newspapers: "Shall I refuse to shake the hands of these, and to entertain them with affable conversation, merely because they write puffs in the newspapers?" and he answered and said, "No." And he

didn't. Nay, he gave them twice the amount of the chicken and also of the champagne, that they might by no means feel lonesome and out in the cold; and this to the great tightening of their waistcoats.

But there was one habit of him that had the bright eye,



“Corals and teething-rings.”

and this habit was the most affable of all the habits he had, which were all affable.

And this habit, which was affable beyond the affability of all his other habits, was this: he would at all times of the day, and also of the night, embrace any he might meet that wrote puffs in the newspapers; and would straightway

take them into the private bar and drink with them all manner of drinks, either hot or cold, either tall or short, as might the most please and comfort them ; so that when any two or three of those that wrote puffs in the newspapers should meet together they would say, the one to the other, " For he is a jolly good fellow ! "

And these also were greatly comforted and full of joy.

Then he that had the bright eye, even he that shook hands in so affable a way, got introduced to the wives and families of them that wrote puffs in the newspapers ; and, that the wives and families also might not feel lonesome and out in the cold, he gave them little things, both this little thing and the other little thing ; so that there was no end of the little things which he gave them ; for he would give them all manner of little things, even peaches and peppermint drops, and parasols, and books, and birthday cards, and bric-à-brac. And their babies also would he treat with great honour, presenting them with corals and teething-rings. And these persons also were content.

And it came to pass that, after a while, those that wrote puffs in the newspapers became so filled with a sense of the affability of him of the bright eye, that when they sat at their desks a-writing puffs for the newspapers, they would say within themselves : " As he is so affable, it stands to reason that the work of his hand must be very good and clever." So they did not examine his work (for it was not their business to examine any man's work ; their business was to write puffs), but straightway set down in the newspaper : " His work is very clever ; he is a great man " ; yet they said no word in the newspaper concerning his

affability, nor of his asking after the health of their wives and families.

And this thing grew upon them so that at length they could not forbear from putting mention of him into all subjects of which they wrote, even though these subjects had no connection with him; as, for instance, they would say: "The Queen held a Drawing Room on such a day. He of the knowing eye did not attend"; or, "So-and-so was condemned to penal servitude at the Central Criminal Court; but he of the knowing eye (whose work is so clever) had nothing to do with the case, and was not present"; or "Shares are dull, but he is never dull," and so forth.

And these mentions were meant to be read by the Public, and the Public read them; and, moreover, they that wrote the puffs in the newspapers would often look out from the door of the newspaper office as the Public went by and call out: "He of the knowing eye is a very great man"; and yet they never spoke of his being so affable and inquiring; nor did they call out to the Public from the door of the private bar.

But it is needful to explain who the Public were. They were a class or sect whose duty it was to be innocent and helpless and easily taken in; and there was exceeding great care exercised in the selection of those who were to be members of the Public; for the moment that one of them showed any aptitude for helping himself (especially any aptitude for helping himself to that which belonged to others) he was straightway cast out from being a member of the Public and was compelled to become a member of the Legislature, or of a county council, or of a vestry, or to take up some other capacity in which it was his duty to

defraud the Public. And it was the duty of the Public to believe all they were told (particularly what they were told in the newspapers), and to pay twice its value for everything : and they did their duty.

So in this wise, when the Public read in the newspapers how he of the knowing eye was a very great and clever man, they went about saying one to another, " He is a very great and clever man. Who is he ? "

And all this while that other person who was quiet and had a small business in a back street, and did not ask after the health of the wives and families of them whose duty it was to write puffs in the newspapers ; all this time he had holes in his boots and no jam on his bread. And his head was bald, and he had many lines across the forehead ; and his waistcoat was very loose ; and his name was MR. TALENT.

Then the Public began to inquire, saying, " Who is he that has the bright and knowing eye, and what is his name ? " For, when one would go about speaking of the greatness of a person, it is better that one should know his name ; for, if one does not know his name, then one must needs identify him in some other way, such as saying, " He who wrote so and so," or, " He that drew such a picture " ; the which thing is awkward when one knows nothing of his works, but only knows that he is a great man.

In such wise the Public wished to know his name ; for in certain cases, when one of them would say, " He is a great man," another would say, " What has he achieved ? " whereat the first must needs say, " I know not ; but he is a

great man, for the newspaper says so." Now, if the first speaker had but known his name, he might have answered to the question of the second, "Go to, Ignorance! Dost thou not know the works of A?"

So when the Public said, "What is his name?" those



"Mr. Talent."

who wrote the puffs in the newspapers replied with one voice, "His name is Mr. Talent."

And this was a strange thing, that they did not reply "He is Mr. Affability," or "Mr. Shaker of the Hand"; but they said, "Mr. Talent."

Now when the Public heard this reply they were greatly puzzled; for the name on the door-plate of him who had

the poor little business in a back street was "Mr. Talent." So they went to those whose duty it was to write puffs in the newspapers and said, "Is he the brother of him of the back street?" And those others replied, "We know of no one in a back street. We know of no Mr. Talent except him who is affable and shakes hands frequently, and asks after our families, and drinks with us and gives us chicken and champagne. There is no other Mr. Talent."

But the moment they had said these things they saw that they had forgotten themselves, and made a slip of the tongue. However, it was all right; for the Public, for all they were puzzled by it, did not understand the thing which had been said, being too foolish.

Now, when Mr. Talent of the back street heard of all this, he delayed for some time; and after that wrote a plaintive letter to the editors of the newspapers, saying that he was Mr. Talent, and the other was not. And the editors said to those whose duty it was to write the puffs: "Do you know this Mr. Talent, of the back street? Can he really be Mr. Talent?" And then those others replied: "He cannot be Mr. Talent; for the only Mr. Talent we know always dictates to us what we shall say about his works in the puffs which it is our duty to put in the newspapers; and this one hath never done this thing, so that he cannot be Mr. Talent. But for all that, we will go and inquire, that we may not be in error."

So they went to him that had the bright and knowing eye; and they inquired of him, saying, "Can this other really be Mr. Talent, instead of you?"

And he said, "Nay, he cannot be"; and straightway shook them all by the hand seven times, and made a great

feast of chicken and champagne ; and he also dictated to them many little pars about himself, the which they were to insert in the papers ; and the pars ran thus and thus : “ Mr. Talent, who is a very great man, has gone on a yachting cruise,” and, “ Among the guests at Marlborough House werè the Marquis of A, and Prince B, and Mr.



“ He shook them all by the hand seven times.”

Talent,” and so forth. And those that wrote the puffs went back satisfied to the editors ; and the editors suppressed the letter of him of the back street.

Now, had he of the knowing eye not overlooked one of those whose duty it was to write the puffs, then would all have been well ; but there was one of these whose hand he

had forgotten to shake, and whose wife and family he had neglected to inquire after; so that this one, reading the letter of him of the back street, felt that there might be something in this thing, and that it was his duty to inquire, in order that justice might be done if necessary.

So he went to him of the back street, and inquired of the matter, holding out his hand to be shaken, and stating that he had a family, and looking about on the table to see if the whisky and soda were there; but when he of the back street neither shook his hand, nor inquired of his family, nor gave him to drink, he said to himself that there could be nothing in it; yet, nevertheless, he got his editor to publish the letter, to the end that he of the knowing eye might be reminded that he had not shaken his hand, nor done his duty.

And the Public read this letter in that newspaper, and were dreadfully puzzled and upset; so much so, that some among them began to believe that he of the back street *was* Mr. Talent; and there was great confusion and questioning; and everybody went about saying, "Who is the real Mr. Talent?"

Then said he of the bright eye to himself: "Shall I not go into partnership with this old Talent?" (For you see that he called the other by that name to himself, just as though he himself were not Mr. Talent, but someone else; the which is very curious to think of!) And he said, "This old Talent may be useful even to *me*; at least, I shall be as well with him as without him."

So he went into partnership with him of the back street who had no jam to his bread; and the next week they both came out of the back street and built a palace in the broadest

thoroughfare, and set up gilded lamps, and a flag, and nine footmen in golden liveries, and a trumpeter at the front door.

But when anyone called he was received by him with the knowing eye, and the hands that came to be shaken were



“The public were dreadfully puzzled.”

shaken by him ; and he that had been of the back street was not seen at all, but lived at the very top in an attic, and did the work. So then every one was satisfied, and began to examine the works of Mr. Talent, and found them very good ; and these were the same works which they had examined before, when they had been issued from the shop in the back street ; but they did not recognize them.

And he from the back street was satisfied with this arrangement ; for he was now able to have jam on his bread, and new boots.

And it came to pass one day, when he of the knowing eye was making a speech at a banquet in his honour given by those who wrote the puffs and other admirers of ability, that he let fall from his pocket an envelope addressed to him by his mother.

Now he had always carefully burned these envelopes which he had received from his mother, so that no man might see them. And the principal organizer of the banquet (who was a most Influential Person, and a Great Judge of Talent and Patron of Genuine Ability, and looked upon as a Most Discerning Critic) happened to pick up the envelope ; and behold the name written upon the envelope was "MR. PUSH !"

So then the Great Judge of Talent bit his lip and turned pale and nearly choked ; and all the others at the table, hastening to see what was upon the envelope which had so upset him, read the writing upon it ; and when they saw that the guest of the evening was named "Mr. Push" instead of "Mr. Talent," behold they all bit their lips and turned pale and nearly choked.

But as for MR. PUSH (for that, indeed, was his name, for his mother must needs have known), he smiled more affably than ever ; and went round the table shaking seven times the hand of each one present, and asking after the health of even their most distant relations.

And the next day, when their heads were cool, all the people who had been at the banquet thought that thing calmly out, the right side up ; and they saw, even as

one man, that no Mr. Push could possibly be admitted to exist.

For they said, "Have we not admired him as Mr. Talent, and raved about him, saying: 'He is a great man'? And shall we now say he is not Mr. Talent, as we fancied, but Mr. Push? No, indeed!"



"He let fall from his pocket an envelope."

So, behold, they all went in a body to call upon him, and to assure him that his mother was mistaken about his name, and that he was Mr. Talent.

And they put it fairly to him, saying: "Can we all, being Influential and Competent Appreciators, have made a

mistake?" And he saw the force of their argument; and he frankly admitted that they could not have made a mistake, and that he was Mr. Talent.

Then Mr. Push (for that in truth was his name) said to himself: "I can now dispense with the partnership of old Talent, for will not my work do as well as his, now that it will not do for the critics to have made a mistake? And why should mere Talent take part of the profits that rightly belong to Push?" And he straightway went and turned out poor old Talent from the business, taking away his jam and his new boots—nay, even his bread which he had brought into the firm; and Mr. Push went on producing work on his own account; and the critics, and those whose duty it is to write the puffs for the newspapers (which two classes are by some considered to be identical), cried out louder than ever about his greatness, and told how he parted his hair, and how much mustard he ate, and what sort of hats he wore. And Mr. Push made so much money that he was knighted for being rich; and then a very noble and generous thought occurred to him; and he said to himself: "If I shall be so magnanimous as to build an almshouse, and put old Talent into it, I shall be made a lord, because of my virtue and munificence."

So he builded the almshouse; and on the front of it he put a graven stone which nearly covered the front and made it necessary to place the windows at the back; and on the stone was carven:—

"THIS ALMSHOUSE

WAS ERECTED BY

SIR TALENT

FOR THE BENEFIT OF A POOR RELATION."

But when he tried to find old Talent he could not.

Now at this time that writer of puffs who had not been shaken by the hand by Mr. Push, put it about that Mr. Push and those others whose duty it was to write the puffs in the newspapers were to be prosecuted for conspiring to make away with poor old Talent ; but when Mr. Push had gone about and shaken the hands of the public prosecutor, and of the judges, and of such as might haply be called on the jury, and had asked after the health of their relations, it was publicly denied that there was to be any such prosecution, and Sir Push was made Lord Push and Baron Brazenfront.

And the day after that they found poor old Talent by the roadside, dead of starvation.

And that is the story of the Identity of Mr. Push.





IT was all old Joe Wilkings's notion, every ounce of it: you see, there never was anybody anywhere to compare with old Joe for "go." He *was* goey, was old Joe—but I'll tell you.

Old Joe had been laid up with rheumatism and gout—ah! and asthma, that's more—for a matter of eleven weeks; pretty bad he'd been too, and everybody had said he would never pull through, being, you see, ninety-seven, and a wooden leg in, that he'd lost in the Crimean War; at least, not the wooden one, for he'd found that in the loft over the stable years ago and taken to it.

Well, old Joe was sunning himself in his wicker chair in the front garden, propped up with pillows and things; and he'd just finished his beef-tea, when he begins to chuckle so in an internal kind of manner that the last drop going down got startled and separated from the others on ahead, and tried to turn back, and got in a panic; so that it nearly

choked old Joe, who got purple in the face, and had to be thumped.

He'd no sooner got right than he began to chuckle again, but luckily that last drop had got further down now, and wedged in among its comrades, so that it only heard the chuckles faintly, and kept quiet this time.

"Whatever *is* the matter, grandfather?" said Kate.

"Matter?" said old Joe. "Nothing's the matter. You don't understand the ways of young 'uns, nor their methods neither. When youth chuckles, it's a sign of good spirits and healthy. If you *must* know, I was thinking we might have a picnic—just like we used to have sixty years back—"

"Ah! that *would* be nice," said Kate.

"Not *you*," said old Joe. "No young 'uns in it—they're too slow. No; I and Georgie Worble, and his aunt Susan, and her mother, and—"

"Why," said Kate, "Mr. Worble hasn't walked from one room to another without assistance for—"

"I know—seven years," said old Joe, "and he's seventy-six; and his aunt Susan's seventy-one; and his aunt Susan's mother's ninety-two, and bedridden—but I tell you what: it's all fudge and the undue influence of imagination—that's the whole story. Georgie W. can get up if he likes; and his aunt Susan's bronchitis and paralytic strokes are all fudge; and as to her mother being bedridden—pooh! we'll just see; and if she doesn't dance just as well as me—"

"Dance!"

"Ah—we'll have a dance, of course—we *used* to have a dance always; finished up with a dance. I've been thinking—and I don't mind telling you—that this imagination and

fudge is making us all old before our time ; and I'm not going to stand any more of it, and that's all about it."

With that old Joe Wilkings waved his stick and jumped up—that's what he did ; and he ninety-seven years and nine weeks ! Talk about greyness !

Kate stared, and all the neighbours stared, and Mrs. Widdlcombe's pug next door stared so that its eyes nearly fell out, as old Joe trotted quickly out of the garden and down the street, and trotted up Mr. Worble's steps, and tapped at the door like a boy that means to run away ; and when they opened the door up he ran to old Worble's room, and toddled in.

And now comes in old Joe Wilkings's other remarkable quality—his influence over others. It was all the outcome of his wonderful determination—the influence of mind over matter. He could bamboozle anyone, could Joe—it was for all the world like magic.

Old Worble was drooping over the fire in his big chair, into which he had been put hours before.

What did old Joe do but go right up and slap him on the back in that hearty way that old Worble went as near screaming as his weak state would let him !

"Get up, Georgie Worble," shouted old Joe, "and come round with me to Sam Waggs to arrange about that picnic !"

Old Worble crooned and doddered, and feebly repeated "Picnic ?"

"Ah, picnic, young 'un ; and you've just hit it. But GET UP, I say !"

And, if you'll believe it, the third time old Joe Wilkings shouted "Get up" in that voice of his, a-staring straight at

Worble all the time, old Worble *did* slowly get up and stood, doddering, but without support.

“Don’t you stand a-doddering at me like that as if you were a decrepit old idiot instead of a boy; but just reach



“Old Joe trotted quickly out of the garden.”

down your hat and bustle along,” said old Joe; and if Worble, after looking feebly and hopelessly up at the hat on the high peg—the hat he had not worn for years—didn’t hop up on a wooden chair and fetch it down and dash it on

his head, and then toddle downstairs and into the street arm-in-arm with old Joe !

If people had stared when old Joe came out of his garden, what did they do *now* when he and old Worble went dancing down the street arm-in-arm, both of 'em chuckling like mad and chattering like magpies ?

At the corner they met old Peter Scrouths in a bath-chair. Peter had a paralyzed leg, and was so feeble that he could hardly wink his eye, and so deaf that it was all he could do to hear with an ear-trumpet as big as the cornucopia belonging to the wooden young lady over the provision stores.

“Just you step out and walk !” roared old Joe in the ear-trumpet. And the queer thing is that old Peter did begin to get out ; and not only began, but went on ; and stood on the pavement ; and then took Joe's arm : and the three went careering down the street together !

The whole place came out to stare open-mouthed at those three old boys bouncing down the street together.

Half-way down old Joe Wilkings stopped with a jerk, and turned on old Peter.

“What, in the name of goodness, *do* you want with that trumpet machine ?” he roared. “A young 'un like you ! Lookee here—let's get rid of it.” And Joe snatched the ear-trumpet out of his hand, and jerked it over a shed into the field behind. It was a good long jerk ; and most of the young men of the place would have been proud to do it.

“Can hear just as well as I can ; that's what *you* can do ! Can't he, young George ?”

Old Peter looked dazed ; but old Joe stood nodding at him so decisively that old George took it up and nodded

decisively too; and they were so convincing about the matter that old Peter began to believe he *could* hear; and from that moment, if you'll believe me, he *did* hear quite comfortably!

Then the inhabitants collected in little knots, and talked the matter over; and decided that there must be something wrong, in the witchcraft line; and shook their heads doubt-



“The three went careering down the street.”

fully; but those three old boys trotted into the “Bun and Bottle” and ordered—ah! and drank off—a pint of beer apiece; a thing they had not done those ten years. Drank it off at a draught, if you'll believe me.

Well, then they went the round and beat up all the old folks of the place to bid them to the picnic. Those old people stared, and shook their heads and scoffed; but old Joe Wilkings hadn't talked to them for five minutes before

they were up on their feet and trotting about as if they were acrobats, though perhaps it's hard to believe.

"We'll have a row on the river," said old Joe; "and then we'll picnic on the bank, and see who can climb trees best; and then we'll have a room at a hotel, and finish up with a dance, and just show 'em how it ought to be done."

I tell you he had to busy himself, had old Joe, to keep them up to it; for as soon as he had been away from any one of them a few hours that one would begin to collapse again, and think he or she was as weak as ever: but Joe wouldn't allow this; all day long he was here and there among them applying the spur, bullying them into getting up and dancing, and roaring with indignation at the idea of their being old. He made them practice their steps, and while those who possessed crutches were doing it, he sneaked off with the crutches and concealed them. He wouldn't even allow them sticks, wouldn't old Joe—not he.

Old Worble's aunt Susan got quite young and skittish; and as for old Worble's aunt Susan's mother, who was bedridden, up she had to get on old Joe Wilkings's third visit, and had to toddle across the room. He drilled her—kept on at it; he was there twice a day; and every time she had to get out of bed and toddle across the room. Had to live in her dressing-gown, and could get no peace for the life of her; but, bless you, in ten days she had begun to believe that she had never been bedridden at all, and that it was all fancy! And all in consequence of that strange influence of old Joe Wilkings; that awful determination of his.

Then there were the provisions to prepare for that picnic; and old Joe would insist upon the old folks preparing them.

He wouldn't have any young people in it—not he. He was here, there, and everywhere, compelling them to superintend the cooking of the joints and pies—for he was not going to have any beef-tea or arrow-root or pap at the picnic, but all good solid food for robust people.

Well, the eventful day came; and there were the old



“ Aunt Susan’s mother.”

folks collected at the railway station with their hampers and bags. The whole population of younger folks had turned out to see them off; but not a single one of them was to go, for old Joe wouldn't have anyone under the age of sixty-five, as he said children were always a trouble at an outing. And, what's more, his word seemed to be law, and that was the long and the short of it.

The young people shook their heads forebodingly, and said they didn't know what on earth would come of it all; that they didn't; and they only hoped uncle and aunt and grandfather would come back all right!

But the train came in, and in hopped the old parties, and away they went.

Old Joe Wilkings had his work cut out now, with a vengeance and all: for as soon as the old 'uns had got away from the younger folks who usually took care of them, they began to think it was all over with them and to give way; but Joe Wilkings roared and shouted at them and chuckled and threatened until he had brought them all round again. There wasn't to be a single bath-chair, or a crutch, or even a stick.

Then they got out at the station they had settled on; and old Joe insisted on their carrying the hampers among them down to the river: and, what's more, he chose a way across the fields where there were a lot of stiles to get over; and he made 'em do it, if you'll credit it. Old George Worble's aunt Susan's mother pretended she couldn't, and sat down and wept: but Joe Wilkings had her on her feet again in a twinkling; and over she had to go somehow.

Then old Peter Scrouths began to give way and grizzle for his bath-chair and ear-trumpet, but when old Joe threatened to fight him if he went on about that nonsense, why, he just had to behave himself.

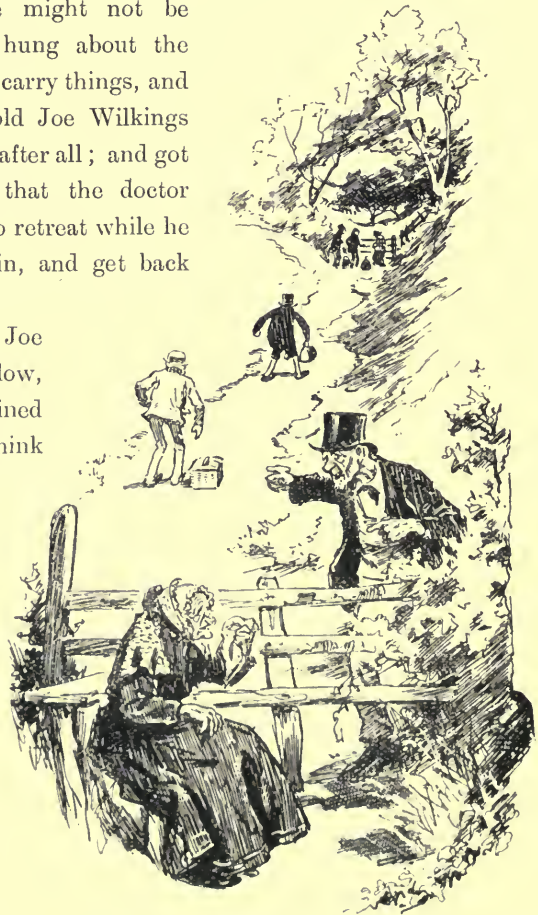
Our doctor had made up his mind that something dreadful was bound to come of the whole thing, and sneaked after them by the next train; but when Joe caught him following them he was so angry and furious about it that the doctor was afraid he would have an apoplectic fit unless he went

away as Joe commanded him to. So he retired; and subsequently dressed himself as a rustic, and smeared his face so that he might not be recognized, and hung about the party, offering to carry things, and so on. But if old Joe Wilkings did not spot him after all; and got in such a rage that the doctor thought it best to retreat while he had a whole skin, and get back safely home.

So you see old Joe was a terrible fellow, and that determined it's awful to think about.

Well, they went on the river, and they rowed little races among themselves; and old Ben Jumper and old Tobias Budd upset their boat, sky-larking — both of 'em being

just turned eighty—and went in, and were very nearly drowned. However, they were hauled out and made to run



“Over she had to go somehow.”

about, and taken into a cottage, and rubbed down, and dressed up in borrowed clothes; and with a good jorum of brandy-and-water apiece, why, in half an hour they were as right as trivets, if you'll believe me!

The cold collation was a great success; and then the old boys had a smoke, and were all as jolly as sand-boys. But, suddenly, one of 'em looked round and said, "Why, where's old Joe Wilkings?" And after ten minutes, when old Joe did not turn up, all those old folks began to shake their heads doubtfully and dismally, and the old boys dropped their pipes, and the old ladies began to weep and whinnick.

For old Joe Wilkings being wild-like with merriment, had gone in pretty heavily for the champagne and stuff and had got a bit mixed, as you might say; and he had gone off a little way to get some dry wood to make a fire to boil the kettle over, and then he hadn't seemed to be able to recollect which was his way back; and had wandered and wandered off in quite the wrong direction; and at last he had got drowsy and fallen asleep in a dry ditch with his wooden leg on the lower rail of a fence; and then a local policeman who didn't know him had taken charge of him and trotted him off to Winklechurch, which was the nearest village.

And those old people at the picnic got more and more depressed and feeble and helpless; and some of 'em broke down completely, and wept and doddered; for you see the influence of old Joe Wilkings's determination was rapidly giving out. And at last, after the doctor had waited anxiously at the railway station for them, and hour after hour went by without any signs of them, he decided to look them up at any cost; and at eleven that night he found them all sitting there on the bank of the river that depressed

and helpless you can't imagine. Not a single one of them all had had the courage to move, and their fright and despair were perfectly fearful. And a nice trouble he had to get them home—had to send for flies, and bath-chairs, and litters, and goodness alone knows what all!



“Very nearly drowned.”

Well, then they had to find old Joe Wilkings, and mighty anxious they were about him; and a nice tramp they had up hill and down dale before they discovered him; and when they did, they found him rolled up in a shawl on the policeman's hearthrug, for, of course, Mr. Podder, the policeman, was not going to lock up the likes of an old boy of his age. Joe Wilkings had recovered a bit now, and he

was that pugnacious he wanted to fight Mr. Podder and all those that had come to find him; and what should he do but put his back against Mr. Podder's parlour-wall (smashing the glass of the chromo of "Little Red Riding-Hood" that was hanging up), and invite the lot to "Come on."

However, they quieted him down and got him home at last; and when he'd got home he was that dismal and depressed from the reaction that he sat in his arm-chair all day and did nothing but grumble and burst into tears; for, you see, he'd overdone it, and it was bound to tell upon him. But after that all his natural pluck and determination got hold of him again, and if he wasn't mad to have that dance that they had been balked of!

Out he went to beat up all the old folks again; but most of 'em were ill in bed—none the better for that picnic, I can tell you; though luckily it had been a lovely day and night, as warm as toast, so that they hadn't come to much harm beyond the exhaustion.

The younger people of the houses where he called met him with black looks enough, you may be sure; but old Joe Wilkings wasn't the sort to be daunted by that sort of thing; and bless me if he didn't succeed in getting at most of those old parties again, and even getting some of them out of bed and putting them through their paces as before.

It was really getting serious; so Mr. Sarme the vicar, and Mr. Weazle the curate, and Doctor Pillikin (who lived in the house with the brown shutters then, before he moved next door to the stores) went and tried to get him out of the houses and make him keep quiet; but old Joe roared at

them that way that they were glad to get away home again in despair.

Ah, he *was* a plucky one, was old Joe!



“ Old Joe Wilkings after lunch.”

Well, he persevered and kept at it until he had persuaded all those old parties to get up a dance in the schoolroom; they were to have printed programmes, and champagne, and everything in style—for Joe had a bit of money, and was as

free as you like with it, and meant to stand a good deal more than his share of the expenses.

Then the vicar and Doctor Pillikin consulted with the squire—the squire and the vicar being justices of the peace—whether they hadn't better give old Joe in charge and lock him up out of harm's way; for he was getting a regular firebrand, don't you see; and they were afraid he'd be the death of those old folks. But after they'd consulted, they couldn't hit on any legal excuse for charging him—(not that that little obstacle mostly stands in the way of justices of the peace)—and they had to give that up.

When the day arrived for the ball—for they called it a "ball" now, bless you—all the young people agreed together to lock the old parties in their rooms to prevent them going; but bless me if old Peter Scrouts and old George Worble, and one or two other desperate characters didn't manage to get out somehow, being so under the influence of Joe; and when the hour came for the dance, there they were at the schoolroom!

And they—about nine of them—began dancing too, and a regular strange kind of a hobble it was, as ever was seen: but at last the squire and the vicar and Doctor Pillikin went down with the sergeant and a constable and pretended that a new Act had been passed making it illegal to dance after nine o'clock, and cleared the hall, with Joe dinging away at 'em the whole time; and made the old folks go home.

Next day Joe Wilkings was going to do all manner of things—going up to London to consult a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn, and appeal to the High Courts, and give the squire and the rest of 'em penal servitude at Botany Bay, and all manner; but he'd caught such a cold at that ball that

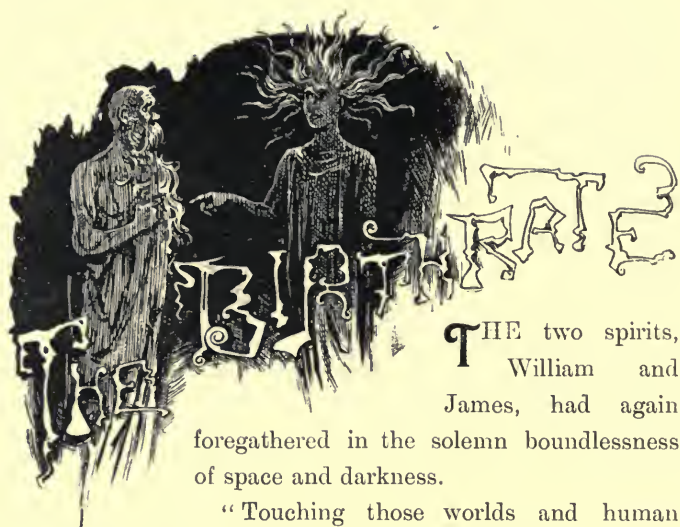
he had to take to his bed again, in spite of all his determination ; and when he got up again after three weeks he had lost the use of his one leg, and was so weak he hadn't the heart to do anything. He was in a bad way for a long time,



“ Getting better again.”

but they say he's getting better again now ; and I've heard tell that the squire and that lot are beginning to get nervous again, as there's no knowing when he'll break out.

He's a tough one, is old Joe Wilkings ; and, if you'll believe me, he'll make it hot for 'em yet !



THE two spirits, William and James, had again foregathered in the solemn boundlessness of space and darkness.

“Touching those worlds and human beings whose existence I imagined—” said James.

William yawned wearily ; but, unable to plead any sudden excuse for departure which would not be too discourteously transparent, resigned himself to the unavoidable.

“I have been studying this hypnotism of which I spoke as one of my fancies, and if you have no objection I fancy that I could—with your assistance—influence your mind to an extent which might enable you mentally to perceive some of the scenes which might be called into existence by the creation—if that were possible—of intelligent beings—”

“Intell—?” said William.

“Well, well—beings possessed of reason—ah, as opposed to instinct. I have not, perhaps, explained that I should propose the existence of other animals in addition to these

human beings; *lower* animals which would possess only *instinct*."

"And what would be the difference between reason and instinct?" asked William.

"Well," replied James. "Ah—well—instinct would be infallible, while reason would not. Instinct would arrive—er—instinctively—at fact and truth."

"Ah," said the objectionable William, "now I perceive the meaning of your phrase, '*Reason as opposed to instinct*.' However, let us have a game at this hypnotism which you propose to try. I presume I am to attempt to subordinate my mind to yours—subordinate, as it were, instinct to mere reason—for the time being?"

They took the matter methodically in hand, and with such success that within a few particles of eternity James asked his companion spirit whether he seemed to perceive anything, and William replied,—

"Why—upon my word, yes! I seem to be conscious of a most hideous hubbub, discord, babel, and confusion—of an incessant wrangling, recrimination, and grumbling. It's perfectly bewildering and awful. I seem to see masses of forms, all struggling, and kicking and rending one another—crawling over and treading on each other. What a horribly unpleasant state of affairs!"

"That's it!" cried James, with excited enthusiasm. "That's one of my worlds! Those are my human beings! You perceive it all perfectly! Now I wish you to tell me what strikes you most forcibly amid the confusion."

"Why—well—here are a group of human beings screaming with acute lamentation all in one key. They appear to be screaming for 'babies': they are calling upon the sky

to rain down babies on their land, and upon the sea to wash up babies on the shore in shoals, like herrings! What can they require all those babies for? Surely not to eat?"

"Oh, no; not to eat. To increase the population. You will recall our touching upon the mania of these human creatures for increase of population, in our last talk on the subject? Well, this group of creatures are the legislators of one of the nations, and they are frantic with grief because the population does not increase with sufficient rapidity."

"Ah, yes," said William, "I perceive that they have temporarily ceased their shrieks of lamentation in order to discuss various wild projects for increasing the population more rapidly. They are proposing taxes on bachelors, and premiums on large families, and other equally strange expedients. What very eccentric fellows, to be sure! What *can* they require all these babies for?"

"To—er—kill! Not to kill while babies, but after they are grown up into soldiers. The beautiful philoprogenitive instinct is very strong in these human beings of mine; their tenderness towards children is really touching. There are many societies for the protection of children; and human governments are very severe upon violence to children. You see—er—if an infant is killed it is—er—disqualified for being subsequently slaughtered on the field of battle.

"Infanticide is regarded as a most heartless crime. You now perceive that that group of legislators are glaring at an adjacent island containing another nation, and are shrieking with anger and envy! That is because that insular nation has so many more babies, and increases so much more rapidly in population."

“ Oh, ah, yes! I perceive the island you mention,” said William. “ It appears to me to be inconveniently crowded already; in fact, it seems unable to produce food enough to support its population.”

“ Oh! it is—it is! It is a most happy island; the happiness of a given district being always measured by its population. A large tract of land filled with the beauties of inanimate nature, but having a population insufficient to pollute the air, is considered a very sad sight; and earnest efforts are always made to crowd it with immigrants.”

“ I perceive an enormous congregation of your human beings on this island—a dense mass of them, all pushing and squeezing for want of space, and seething over each other as if they were boiling,” said William.

“ Yes,” explained James, “ that is the capital of the island, and the largest city in this particular world. It is so crowded that the air is unfit to breathe, and is full of sulphur and other poisons from the fires made by the inhabitants. Perfect health is unknown within its bounds. Everybody suffers perpetually from his liver, and has to suddenly ‘ knock off ’ from active business for about three weeks in every month; everyone is in the doctor’s hands all the year round—that is, while the doctor is not prevented from attending him by being ill in bed himself; you see, as the general illness originates from overwork, and as the doctors are under the circumstances the most overworked section of the community, the doctors are generally a little more ill than their patients.

“ Everybody suffers from chronic nerves, and ‘ jumps,’ and ‘ blues,’ and various other diseases with similar scientific names; in fact, everybody has nothing particular

the matter with him—no serious illness—and is in consequence always seriously ill. It is all the result of civilization, or over population—which are exchangeable terms for the same thing.”

“Hum!” grumbled the unreflecting William. “Don’t quite see why they need be! Why can’t your civilized communities draw the line when the population has reached



“The doctors are generally more ill than the patients.”

its comfortable limits, and smother the superfluous individ—”

“Oh, William! How can you? What a horrible idea! Smother their fellow-creatures! No, William; morality, piety, the better feelings of the community would with one accord rebel against so hideous and shocking an expedient—nay, it would not do at all. I have told you that the surplus population are required to be smashed and torn to death by explosives, and cut to pieces with swords, and so

forth. Pray do not make such dreadful suggestions again ! This city increases its population with incredible rapidity ; it is, in fact the envy of the world, and is always pointed to as a model."

" What a noise of cheering there is over in that part of the



" Public-spirited joy."

city !" exclaimed William. " There are all sorts of decorations, and illuminations, and triumphal arches."

" Ah ! that parish has gained the prize for the highest birth-rate ; and you perceive it is erecting immense buildings within its bounds. These are new workhouses to receive the increment of population, which will of course be unable

to find a means of livelihood. That parish is the champion parish of that great city—a guiding star for all the parishes in the world. The paupers in it—two-thirds of the entire population—have just been put on half rations in consequence of the increasing strain on the parish resources ; but those paupers are wise enough to perceive that increase of population is the greatest boon, the highest aim of a community ; and are filled with public-spirited joy at the deduction from their allowance of food.

“ Let me show you a picture of the place a few hundred years later—a year is a small division of time. It would be difficult to make you understand exactly what I mean by the abstract thing called Time, which I have conceived. Never mind.”

Something seemed to whirl past the consciousness of William ; and then another picture of the same island seemed to present itself before him. He fell to coughing and gasping violently, and grew purple in the face.

“ Oh, dear—what a horrible atmosphere !” he exclaimed. “ I can’t breathe ! Whatever is the matter ? What a dreadful pressure of elbows there is all round me ; and how the ground moves about under one’s feet as if there were an earthquake ! ”

“ It isn’t an earthquake,” explained James ; “ it is merely that part of the population which, being weaker, has got trodden under foot—there being insufficient standing-room on the island for all. The stratum of those trodden under foot is about 15 feet deep by this time ; and you may perceive that fresh numbers are continually falling from pressure and suffocation ; there being of course insufficient air for all.

“But, just consider!—The birth-rate is always steadily on the increase, and the population is more jubilant than ever. It is a most happy island; and all the other nations are mad with envy.”



“Nearly torn to pieces.”

“Here! Help! I don’t like this!” screamed William. “I’m being whirled away by the crowd, and nearly torn to pieces! Why are they all rushing so? What’s the matter?”

“Oh, they have only caught sight of a scrap of food,

said James. "You see, the island can neither produce nor import anything approaching a sufficiency of food for the population, so everyone is chronically ravenous. But this by no means discounts the jubilation at the magnificent birth-rate. Here, give me your hand, and let me help you up to a place of comparative safety on the roof of this cathedral, where the pressure of the crowd is less great. That's all right."

"What is the matter with that throng over there? Why do they give evidence of such wild indignation?"

"It is a meeting of working-men, convened to express indignation at a suggestion lately made that some of them should emigrate in search of the employment and subsistence which they cannot find here. If they can get hold of the author of the heartless suggestion, they will tear him in pieces. He has had the cynical effrontery to propose that they shall proceed across the ocean and settle on a fertile tract of country where every one of them would have room, pure air, and plenty of food! As he has gone there himself, they unfortunately cannot get at him to rend him limb from limb."

"And who is this young man over whom so many people are weeping, and who is evidently the victim of some terrible misfortune?"

"Oh! why, he is a very extraordinary person, with a strangely warped mind; in fact, the majority of the population look upon him as insane. He has actually decided to emigrate to that country across the ocean, and get a breath of fresh air and sufficient meals. He is looked upon as the victim of pernicious machinations, and sincerely pitied. See, he is pushing toward the sea-shore, and making his

way over the bodies of those who have been squeezed out at the edge of the land into the sea. Now he reaches one of the ships which lie, packed like pilchards, in the channel. Poor fellow! Perhaps he may never more behold the happy land of his childhood, where the birth-rate is so high!"

"There is another meeting," said William. "They are lamenting the increasing tendency of young men to remain bachelors instead of marrying and bringing up large families. This state of things is deplored as very serious and regrettable, and as a very unfortunate omen for the future of the population; and they proceed to suggest and consider means for inducing young men to marry at as early an age as possible. It is a very sad meeting!"

"Yes," said James; "you see they are beginning to fear that the race is dying out. That person speaking is a celebrated statistician who has made a calculation showing that, should the birth-rate continue on the same meagre lines, in the course of one hundred years everyone would find space to sit down; in two hundred years folks would be obliged to stick out their elbows in order to touch one another continuously over the whole island.

"What a terrible picture! Tears come into the eyes of the orator as he draws it: 'Where,' he asks, would be that compactness and unity which are the only safeguards of a nation? How could man keep touch with man? Think of that cold, hopeless, terrible void between one beating human heart and another!"

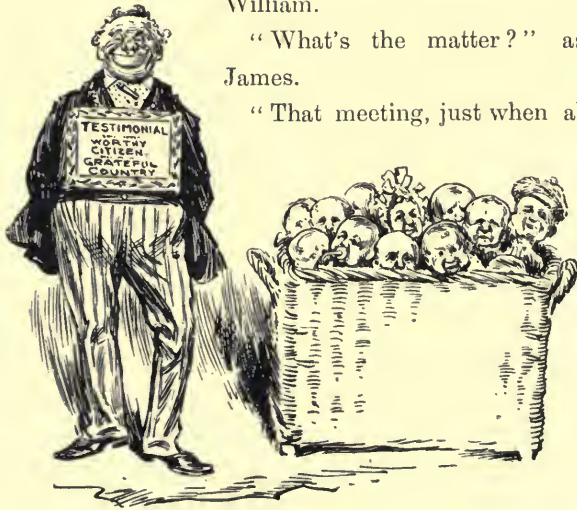
"See—they are presenting a testimonial to an extremely deserving citizen; one Jones, a person of the lower middle classes, who is possessed of a family of no less than thirty-

seven. That man is certain of a career; he has only to express a wish for any public office to receive it at once; and see, even now the meeting suggests the creation of a new office in the Ministry on purpose for Jones—the office of ‘Encourager of the Birth-rate,’ at a salary of five thousand a year.”

“Dear me, that is very unfortunate!” exclaimed William.

“What’s the matter?” asked James.

“That meeting, just when about



“Jones.”

to hit upon a practical plan for arresting the decline of the birth-rate, have been all smothered by the pressure of numbers! Ha! What is that? Surely the sound of a trumpet! See—look! That nation which is so filled with envy of the insular nation is about to make war upon it.”

“Ha!” cried James triumphantly. “Now we shall see how the birth-rate tells! Now we shall see how the nation

with the largest population has the incalculable advantage over the one which— What *is* the matter now?”

“Why, the envious nation with the low birth-rate has completely conquered the insular one, and is jumping on its flag!”

“Pooh! All a mistake!” screamed James. “Impossible. How about its vast population, ready at the call of its native land to rise against the foe?”

“Why,” replied William, “the vast population ready at the call of its native land somehow smothered and crushed itself to death in the attempt to get to the foe; and, as it was a dense mass, the foe’s cannon had greater effect upon it; and then the foe having a lower birth-rate, and consequently more elbow-room—”





I HAVE the most severe misgiving about a crucial point of this story; it involves an announcement which may cause the modern reader to throw aside the narrative as a preposterous absurdity. Ah! if I only had to deal with the reader of the Dark Ages, who would swallow anything! Absolute fear incites me to keep this announcement to myself until nearing the end of the tale, and then to break the awkward fact very gently—glossing it over as much as possible; but native outspoken-

ness, assisted by the fact that such a course would spoil the story, persuades me to make the risky announcement at once and chance the consequences.

Very well, then—Andrew P. Hay was a Centaur—a CENTAUR. He had descended from the pure blood of the old Greek Centaurs. The race, when the belief in the Greek mythology had waned before the spreading light of Christianity, finding the fact of its existence no longer accepted with the old unquestioning faith, and too proud to longer impose its presence on a society sceptical of its reality, retired to a remote island to carry on its existence unseen by mankind ; and there its successive generations had appeared and died, until—a few years before the present date—the last survivor paced with downcast hoof,¹ the deserted paddocks of his sires.²

The loneliness of his condition began to prey upon his mind. He had but a single companion in the secluded upland valleys of that deserted island where his forefathers had lived during so many centuries ; this companion was his servant, or valet—he also being the sole survivor of *his* race, the race of hippopaides, or stable-boys, from time immemorial the bondsmen of the Centaurs and their faithful attendants.

The loneliness was becoming unbearable : concealed behind some crag of the mountains, the two would stand for whole days watching for the smoke of the steamers which passed hull down to and from Constantinople and Smyrna. No vessel ever touched at their island.

“ Raiboskeles,” said Philippos Chortophagos (that was the

¹ “Downcast hoof,” though an unusual, is a good phrase.

² “Sires” is a well-chosen word in this connection.

Centaur's name, excusable in a Greek), "this won't do! I can't stand it any longer. Shall we hurl ourselves from yonder pinnacle, you seated on my back, to fathomless doom, and end it?"

"No, my lord!" said the boy. "I'm scratched for that event anyway; and what's more, *you* won't go to the post either, if I can stop it! Think, my lord—what would your sires, now passed away, have said about a fixture like that?" And the boy's eyes filled with tears as he mechanically took from his pocket a small curry-comb and drew it caressingly over the silky hide, while a low continuous hissing sound from between his lips testified to the depth of his sorrow.

He was a good lad, tinged with the archaic stable-slang of Thessaly fostered by constant reading of the *Rhodochroon Hen*, the ancient sporting paper of the Centaurs.

For a few moments Chortophagos gazed fixedly out to sea; then he said:—

"Raiboskeles, I cannot stay here. I shall go mad in this solitude. Let us leave this island and go among men. I know what you are about to say—they will not believe in my existence. I shall be forced to suffer the affront of being looked upon as a figment of superstition, of having my impossibility cast in my teeth—I wager that is what is on your tongue?"

"No takers!" said the boy emphatically.

"Nevertheless I prefer even that to the loneliness of this place. Besides, I might perhaps manage to conceal the difference in my form from those of men."

The stable valet shook his head doubtfully. "Too much handicapped!" he murmured.

“ I might adopt a false name ! ” cried the Centaur, with a sudden inspiration.

The idea took the stable valet unawares. “ Ah ! there’s something in that tip ! ” he said, half persuaded.



“ He slipped it over the head of his master.”

“ I will—I’ll find one at once : and that’ll break the neck of the whole difficulty ! I have it—I’ll call myself Hay—Andrew P. Hay. See ?—Hay retains enough of my ancestral name ; the Philip I’ll retain as a reminder of my duty toward

my race ; while the Andrew will assert the manhood of part of me—eh ? ”

“ Ye—es,” said Raiboskeles, reflecting. “ I think I’ll befriend that dodge at commanding prices.” This *Rhodochroon Hen* phraseology was oppressive at times ; but his heart was in the right place.

“ Let us hail a steamer somehow,” cried the Centaur (whom we will henceforth call Andrew P. Hay).

The valet stood for a moment plunged in thought, smacking his bare leg with an olive twig ; then he said,—

“ You’ll have to travel as a gee. Half a sec ! ”

With incredible dexterity he plaited reeds from an adjacent stream into the form of a horse’s head-and-neck cover ; then respectfully slipped it over the human head and torso of his master. The part where the horse’s nose should have been he had packed with grass : the head of Andrew P. Hay filled up the crown ; while his human body made a fair show, beneath the covering, of being a horse’s neck. The breadth where the man’s shoulders came, the valet subsequently explained by stating that he had placed a collar of osiers there to keep off the rub of the covering. There seemed an indignity about it which Mr. Hay found it hard to bear ; but he got over it.

Then the valet made a great fire of dry wood and grasses on a pinnacle ; and the great column of smoke attracted the attention of a passing coaster, which bore down on the island to find out the reason of it. Bowes (that being the new name which Mr. Hay had found for his stable valet) stood on the shore holding his charge with a halter of twisted grasses. The captain was surprised, but agreed to take them aboard provided the horse could swim to the

vessel, which could not get in : so Mr. Hay, with Bowes on his back, promptly took to the water and was hoisted aboard in a sling from the davits.

“That’s a very remarkable animal!” said the Greek captain to Bowes. His dialect was atrocious. Bowes could not understand a word ; but signs did just as well.

Mr. Andrew P. Hay had decided to go to London. He knew a fair amount of English ; for several years before a box from a wrecked vessel had been cast ashore on the island, and it had happened to contain some useful books and papers—a text of Homer, interlined with Mr. Gladstone’s translation into English, several Greek-English primers, a Liddell and Scott’s lexicon, some Ollendorffs, a Lindley Murray, Webster’s American Dictionary, several issues of the *Times*, and a rhyming dictionary. Thus had A. P. Hay been enabled to learn the English language.

The journey to England was full of unpleasantness. There were difficulties, too, about meals ; the Centaur having conceived a growing distaste for hay and beans. The coaster had landed them at Otranto, where Bowes promptly engaged a private stable for his master. Now occurred the first difficulty—they had no money. The captain of the coaster had yet to be paid.

But Bowes contrived to obtain on credit a suit of clothes in place of his tunic of woven grasses.

“There’s only one way out of this, sir,” said Bowes, after a spell of thought ; “I shall have to sell you !”

“I fail to catch your meaning,” said Mr. Hay, loftily pawing the ground. “Sell *me* ?”

“That’s it, sir ; that’s the only plan *I* can back for a place. You ought to fetch a good round sum, sir. Why,

sir, look at you—there you stand, 17.1, deep in the girth, lovely clean houghs and pasterns, sir—look at 'em yourself if you ain't satisfied—sound wind, well planted, born flier, grand action. Look at your pedigree, that's enough! No vice—lady could hunt you, sir—oh, I'm not saying it to flatter you, sir! As for selling you—don't you see," said Bowes, placing his finger to his nose, "that's just a bit of practice, that's all. We shall have to sharp 'em. Let me alone to see to that."

"Well, Bowes," said the master, "I have every confidence in you, although I do not quite grasp your plan. I must only request that you will do no act calculated to lessen our self-respect or—"

"Get us warned off the course?" said Bowes. "Oh, that'll be all square."

"But you forget that no one will buy me without seeing my head! If I show that, all is lost!"

Bowes merely winked, and went out. Otranto was a most unpromising place for selling a fine horse; but Bowes made inquiries, and discovered that a rich Englishman, much given to horses—a gentleman-jockey whose yacht was cruising in those parts—happened to be in town. So Bowes fetched out Mr. Hay, mounted him, and caracoled him all over the place where a horse could manage to go; and presently he caught the eye of the gentleman-jockey. The latter had never seen such a picture of a horse in his life, and yearned to own Mr. Hay.

Bowes explained that he wasn't for sale; that, in fact, he was half sold already to an American millionaire. (Bowes had picked up a considerable smattering of English from his master, you see.)

“Look here,” said the gentleman-jockey, “I must have him. On his back I could win every steeplechase in the kingdom. I’ll give you £1000 for him.”

“Down?” said Bowes.



“I’ll give you £1000 for him.”

“Yes,” replied the other. “I’ll put off to my yacht and fetch it.”

In an hour the £1000 in gold and Italian paper was in Bowes’s possession. Bowes had explained how it would be

unwise to unwrap Mr. Hay's head and neck then, as a cold wind was blowing, and the horse had caught a slight cold on his voyage. The jockey was so overcome by the magnificence of the visible parts of Mr. Hay, and so convinced of the wonderful bargain he had made, that he was content to take the head and neck for granted rather than let him go to the American millionaire; so Mr. Hay was put back in the stable for the night, and one of the yacht's crew left there to see to his safety.

Shortly after dark Bowes picked the lock and crept in. Silently he placed a newly-acquired saddle on Mr. Hay's back.

"What now?" whispered Andrew P. Hay.

"We must be off at once and cover as many miles as we can before daylight," whispered Bowes.

"But," objected Mr. Hay, "this is immoral!"

All the refined morality of the ancient Centaurs welled up in him.

"Pooh!" whispered Bowes. "Meaning no offence, sir; but it's got to be done!"

At this moment the sailor woke and rose to see what was going on. Now, gentleman and man of honour as Mr. Hay was down to the waist, the instinct of battle and self-preservation in his equine portion instantly gained the ascendancy in those moments when action was called for; and it was with feelings of the most unfeigned horror and regret that he felt himself backing toward the unhappy sailor and taking up a favourable position for an effective kick.

"Bowes!" he said in an agony of apprehension. "Quick! Don't you see what I'm doing? For heavens

sake give me a cut over the quarters! Here—pull my head up, so that I can't lash out!"

But it was too late; the equine nature situated in the hind-quarters had prevailed: there was an end of the sailor: Andrew P. Hay hid his face in his hands with a bitter sob, and suffered himself to be led out and mounted in silence.

"You won't mind my presumption in wearing spurs, sir?" he said, apologetically. "We might want 'em when you get tired."

Andrew P. Hay hardly heard the remark; his thoughts were absorbed by the regrettable incident of the sailor; at a touch of the spur he broke mechanically into a gallop, which he continued steadily far into the night. Suddenly he pulled up.

"Bowes," he said, "I'm famishing—I *must* have a meal; I've eaten nothing since the day before yesterday!"

"All right, sir," replied Bowes, as he prepared to strap on a nose-bag filled with chaff and locust beans; "you shall have a bran-mash as soon as ever we reach—"

"Take away this stuff!" said Mr. Hay, impatiently. "Do you hear? I've taken a dislike to hay and beans and bran-mashes; they're undignified food for a gentleman to eat, and I've done with them. I want a biftek aux pommes frites!"

"Can't get it here, sir," said Bowes, touching his cap. "Oh; why, I've got some sandwiches and a bottle of Marsala in the bag. But, if I may make so bold, the beans would have more stay in 'em—"

"For the equine portion, no doubt. Confound my equine portion, Bowes! It's in disgrace; I'm disgusted with it, and I'll starve it!"

“Let’s wait till we get home, sir, for that—if I might make bold to advise. It’s just the hossey parts you require on the road.”

“Hum! there’s something in that,” said Mr. Hay; “well, give me the disgusting nose-bag; and when I’ve finished the confounded beans I will have a sandwich and a glass of Marsala to remove the taste. . . . This Marsala is a coarse wine, Bowes; was this the best thing you could get?”

They set off again at a gallop; and Mr. Hay soon perceived the wisdom of having temporarily refreshed his horse-part. But his aversion from, and anger against, it grew steadily. As he galloped he continued to brood upon the unjustifiable deed it had so lately committed; and he speculated with an oppressing anxiety on the acts it might commit in the future; realizing, as he did, that he had no moral control over that portion of him.

In spite of mountains, and the necessity for occasional rest, they reached Naples in two days. Here Bowes, having changed to a new and horsey suit of clothes, and provided Mr. Hay with new and handsome horse-clothing (so that they were unrecognizable), engaged a horse-box to Calais.

No mere horse could have covered the distance in the time; so they had eluded pursuit.

They reached London at last, and Bowes took a secluded villa, with stable, in St. John’s Wood. The stable was merely a necessary artifice. With a sigh of relief Andrew P. Hay threw himself down on the hearthrug in the drawing-room; but the bitterness of association with that hateful horse-part was always with him. His dislike of it had grown to a

positive loathing. His conduct when that part of him was in question was really most unreasonable. He would snatch up Bowes's riding-whip—the poker—anything, and belabour that horse-portion until it lashed out at the tables and chairs and smashed them to atoms. These scenes were most painful to Bowes.

Andrew P. Hay was possessed of remarkable aptitude,



“Lashed out at the tables and chairs.”

and, as the £1000 so fraudulently acquired by Bowes was fast running out, it became necessary to cast about for employment. Now, his knowledge of the archaic Greek tongue, history, and antiquities, gained from direct tradition, was considerable; and he wrote to the authorities of the British Museum, the Society of Antiquaries, the Kernoozers' Club, and various other learned bodies, offering himself as correspondent and referee at a reasonable salary.

After some correspondence his services were eagerly accepted; and for a time all worked well. Dr. Schliemann considered him invaluable, and much light was thrown upon the question of early Greek inscriptions, the true site of Troy, and of the Garden of the Hesperides; while much interesting tittle-tattle from authentic sources added to the knowledge of the private character and daily life of Ajax, Achilles, the Muses, Hercules, and others. All this had been communicated by letter; but one calamitous day a learned official from the British Museum called, and, before it could be prevented, had penetrated to the presence of Mr. Hay.

The meeting was most painful. Mr. Hay, attired in a loose morning coat and white waistcoat, was writing a paper on the differences between the Sapphic and Pindaric harps; while his equine part was fraying out the carpet with its hoofs and flicking away flies with its tail. Mr. Hay made a desperate effort to conceal the equine portion with the tails of his coat, but in vain. The official was deeply shocked and pained.

“A—a—ahem! A Centaur, I believe?” he gasped.

Prevarication was useless. Andrew P. Hay bowed stiffly, and motioned the visitor to a chair.

“I—I must confess that I—er—hardly anticipated this—er— I was under the impression that we had been dealing with an ordinary human being—if you’ll excuse my saying so: but, forgive me—I fear the authorities to whom I am answerable will hardly approve of my obtaining information from a—er—a fabulous monster.”

“A *what*, sir?” cried A. P. Hay: and he felt that equine part beginning to edge round for a kick, while his ears were

lying back close to his head—the only equine idiosyncrasy of his human part, but one which distressed him greatly. He shouted for Bowes to catch hold of his head ; he seized the poker and hammered at his flanks ; but all in vain—those terrible hind-legs lashed out : and the official of the British Museum was no more.

It was a terrible affair : everything came out. Poor Mr. Hay was arrested and taken to Bow Street, where he was locked up in the green-yard stables.

The horse-part resisted violently, nearly killing three policemen, and attempting to gallop off ; while Mr. Hay begged them to throw him and sit on his head, and subsequently apologized most sincerely.

The gaoler was very considerate, giving him his choice of oats or the usual fare.

The magistrate was greatly surprised ; but, of course, sent the case for trial. At the trial, although the facts were clearly proved, the jury were divided ; some bringing in a verdict of deliberate murder against Andrew Philip Hay ; some considering him not guilty, but recommending the destruction of the horse-portion as a dangerous animal. The judge, animadverting in the severest terms on the conduct of the prisoner, declared that, although the jury had not been able to agree as to a verdict, society could not exonerate the perpetrator of such a deed ; and exhorted the prisoner to reflect deeply upon his conduct, and make such atonement as remorse and contrition would suggest.

He then proceeded to comment upon the injudiciousness of the prisoner, who (although apparently guiltless of any desire to sacrifice human life) was, nevertheless, greatly to

blame for his recklessness in keeping so dangerous an animal.

His lordship asked whether prisoner would consent to have the animal destroyed. Prisoner was understood to reply that that was impossible for physical reasons which none could regret more deeply than himself.

Great excitement was created at this point by prisoner kicking out the back and sides of the dock, and hurling the usher into the gallery; prisoner, however, having apologized and expressed his belief that the incident had been occasioned by a horsefly, the matter was allowed to drop.

The judge, having retired for an hour to consider his action in the matter, stated that he considered it his duty, while severely deploring the murderous proclivities of the prisoner and regretting that the disagreement of the jury prevented him



“Kicking the usher into the gallery.”

passing the capital sentence, to exonerate the accused from any intention to permit the animal to do grievous bodily harm; and recommended the keeping of it under proper surveillance.

Prisoner having undertaken to lash his equine-part within an inch of its life, his lordship remarked that he could not sanction any proceedings involving cruelty to the lower animals. Prisoner was then discharged.

Andrew P. Hay was plunged in profound misery. The disgrace and exposure of the whole proceedings, the degradation of his self-respect, cast over him a hopeless gloom. For hours he sat on his haunches, his face hidden in his hands, while scalding tears trickled between his fingers: then he suddenly arose, and kicked the villa to fragments.

At length his calmness returned, and he sat down to think the thing out. The exposure had come—why should he not turn it to good account?

“Bowes!” he called. Poor Bowes dragged his bruised remains from among the ruined brickwork.

“Bowes, my pride has gone. I intend to make a fortune by lecturing all over the country about Greek antiquities, and my recent trial. Pack my portmanteau and then go round and engage halls.”

The lectures created a *furor*. The public did not care two straws about Greek antiquities; but they crushed to hear a real live Centaur lecture about a murder case. At the end of a year he had amassed wealth B.D.A.

Andrew Philip, Lord Hippstable, Baron Hay, is now one of the best known and most highly respected—er—men in

society. He was lately presented with a massive service of plate by the Meltonshire Hunt, in acknowledgment of his valued services as master of the hounds; he is the most famous steeplechase—ah—rider of the day; and the last five Derby winners have hailed from his stable—in fact, he entered for one Derby himself, but was disqualified on purely technical grounds; and there is some talk in well-informed circles of his probable succession to the posts of President of the Jockey Club and Equerry to the Prince of Wales.





MOTHER! *Have you seen this?*” exclaimed Genevieve. “*Do listen what the paper says:—*

“*The latest American notion is the recently instituted College of Beauty in New York. The college course knows nothing of dyes, or cosmetics, or powders. . . . One branch of study deals with the features of the face. The most enchanting beauty of expression will result from the methods adopted in the college. The effect of music on the features receives great attention; the eyes are to be enlarged by Verdi’s music; the air of intelligence heightened by Chopin’s; and various other ameliorations brought about by other composers, and poets, and so forth.’ Just fancy, mother!*”

Genevieve was wrapped in silent musing for some minutes; then she arose and crossed over to the mirror and gazed critically into it.

“Of course it’s all nonsense, mother; eh?” she said.

“Most absurd nonsense, my love—most absurd!” replied Mother.

Then Genevieve opened the piano abstractedly and began passing her fingers mechanically over the keys, which, strange to say, gave forth an air by Verdi. The mirror was right opposite Genevieve as she sat at the piano, and she looked casually at it many times.

When tea-time came, two hours and a half later, she was still strumming—strumming a little thing by Verdi, as it happened. Mother sat and smiled upon her indulgently.

That night, when Genevieve had retired to rest, she heard the faint sounds of the piano from the drawing-room; it was playing an air from Verdi. Mother was the only person downstairs who could play the piano.

“Mother,” said Genevieve, next day, “of course that *must* be all nonsense about the College of Beauty, eh? Of course, it would be quite impossible to make oneself more beautiful by—”

“Of course, Jenny, of course—sheer nonsense!” said Mother.

“Ye-es, of course,” said Jenny. “But I’ve often thought I *should* so love to see New York—haven’t you?”

“New York is—no doubt—a—a very interesting place,” said Mother.

“*Do* let’s go—just to see New York!” said Genevieve.

“Er—well; I’ll speak to papa about it. You *do* want a change,” said Mother.

There was a ring.

“Oh, mother, here’s Miss Cloot just getting out of her victoria,” said Genevieve. “Now, the College of Beauty

would be a godsend to her ! You must really tell her about it—it would be a charity !”

Miss Clout was the ugliest old maid in London and its environs within a radius of twenty miles ; she was really dreadful—that’s the only word for it. She was comfortably off, yet she was still a spinster at forty. She was a remarkable woman, was Miss Clout—you’ll see.



“ ‘ An excellent notion,’ said Miss Clout.”

During a lull in the conversation, Mother introduced the subject of the College of Beauty—as a charity. At first Miss Clout listened with somewhat feeble interest ; but after a few moments there suddenly appeared in her eye a remarkable light ; beyond that, there was little perceptible change in her manner ; but anyone who knew her well would have known that that light in her eye meant *something*.

“ Dear me, yes, very interesting—an excellent notion,” said Miss Clout, blandly.

“But you can't think for an instant that there's anything in it?” said Mother.

“Dear me, why not?” said Miss Clout. “I have no doubt there's a great deal in it. Why *shouldn't* there be?—‘*Too wonderful to be true!*’—well, but, are Edison's inventions too wonderful to be true? Oh, dear me, no! Not a bit too wonderful. You may be sure there's something in it.”

“Do—er—do *you* propose to—?” began Mother: and then it suddenly occurred to her that she had better not ask *that* question; so she turned it off to—“get any new things this spring?”

Miss Clout went straight home with that remarkable light in her eye all the time; and when she got in she straightway sat down and wrote a dozen letters. Miss Clout numbered among her extensive acquaintance twelve old maids, all comfortably off, and all plain—though falling short of her own attainments in the latter respect.

On the evening of the following day there was a tea party at Miss Clout's—it consisted of those twelve other old maids of her acquaintance. It was more of a board meeting than an ordinary tea party, for they took their seats round a table at the head of which sat their hostess.

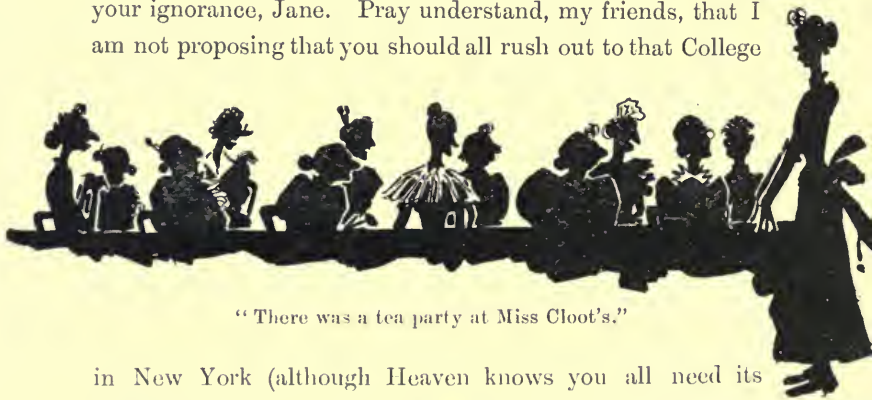
“Ladies!” said Miss Clout (who really *was* a remarkable woman—the more I reflect upon her, the more I am impressed by this fact), “I have asked you here to-day to discuss a very important matter—very important to us. Possibly you may have seen this paragraph in the newspaper?” and she handed round the cutting which she had taken from Genevieve's paper.

The twelve old maids read it, and did not seem to see much in it. Miss Clout's keen intuition perceived this.

“I did not expect you to. We can't *all* be of brilliant intellect, of course,” she said. “Pray don't think I *blame* you for any deficiencies in that respect; we none of us can radically alter the intelligence—or want of it—which has been vouchsafed to us.”

“But this is a hoax, of course, Celina?” said Miss Wheevyl. “Quite absurd and impossible!”

“Not in the least!” replied Miss Clout, emphatically. “Neither absurd nor impossible. That's where you show your ignorance, Jane. Pray understand, my friends, that I am not proposing that you should all rush out to that College



“There was a tea party at Miss Clout's.”

in New York (although Heaven knows you all need its assistance); no, you will do better by remaining where you are. Now, concerning this College. I know what you are going to say—‘It doesn't exist!’ Very well; what *I* have to say is, if it doesn't exist, why—”

At this moment, unfortunately, the door of the council-chamber was suddenly shut, and we heard no more.

“Mother!” said Genevieve, a week or so after, “there's a whole page of advertisement of that College of Beauty in New York! *Do* listen: ‘Ladies desirous of enrolling themselves as students at the College of Beauty are requested to send in their names at once to the secretaress, Madame

Brown. The first hundred ladies will be received at the following reduced fees: Facial-Beauty Curriculum (including Eye-Enlarging, Gaze-Softening, Dimple, Ethereal-Expression, Piquancy, and other classes), \$100 per term of twelve months. . . . The system having now been perfected



“Do listen!”

and exhaustively tested, testimonials from LADIES WELL KNOWN IN SOCIETY, who have been rescued from VARIOUS DEGREES OF HOMELINESS and developed into BEAUTIES of the FIRST WATER, will be sent to all applicants. The leading transatlantic steamship companies have made special arrangements for the conveyance of parties of ladies proceeding to the College of Beauty, New York.’

"Of course it *can't* be true, can it, mother?" said Genevieve.

"Oh dear, no, my love," said Mother.

"But we will go and have a look at New York; won't we?"

"Yes, I think we may as well."

The booming of the College of Beauty re-echoed deafeningly from end to end of the London Press. The subject was dragged into every paragraph about everything. It was the universal topic.

Some weeks after this Jenkinson looked up Wiffler in the evening, and threw himself down in a chair with an exclamation of disgust.

"Hanged if they haven't gone!" he grunted.

"Gone? Who?" said Wiffler, passing the tobacco-jar.

"Why, Mrs. Jenkinson and Genevieve have gone to New York—for a change, they said; but they can't hoodwink *me*. They've gone to that College of Beauty—*that's* where *they've* gone! Nice state of things for me! Left all alone, as if I didn't happen to have such articles as a wife and daughter. . . . Where's *your* wife? Theatre—opera?"

"Not a bit of it!" replied Wiffler, gloomily. "*Gone to New York*, my friend; and *now* I see *why* they were so mad to go that way, although Matilda hates the sea and always gets frightfully ill. *Now* I see!"

At that moment Gradbury burst in melodramatically, the image of despair.

"Hullo, Gradbury!" said the other two, "what's wrong with *you*?"

"Ugh! Everything!" growled Gradbury. "Nice game

for a man's wife and three daughters and niece to go off all at once to—”

“New York?” cried Wiffler and Jenkinson in a breath.

“Ah!—that's the very place!” shrieked Gradbury.

“And I tell you what—I've my suspicions that—”

“Your suspicions are well founded,” said Jenkinson in a hollow voice. “That *was* their object.”

Then those three miserable men went off to the club; and



“Hanged if they haven't gone!”

the hubbub as they entered the smoke-room told them that something was amiss. Frodwell was standing on the hearthrug declaiming about the right place for a wife being by her husband's side instead of frivolling off to crack-brained colleges holding out all manner of insane and impracticable—

About twenty other clubbites stood round and grunted approval.

Anger and gloom were the dominant principles of that smoke-room.

“*Your* wife gone over? Oh, no, of course, you haven’t got a wife,” said Jenkinson to young Flabtree.

“No; and what’s more, I’m not likely to have one now. My best girl’s gone over to New York—for three years she thinks. Hanged if I know how *she* can be improved by that fool of a college—for *that’s* where *she’s* off to, you bet! Her fringe keeps frizzy in wet weather, and she has a little dimple each side of her nose; so what more *can* she want?”

“All *my* best girls have gone!” said poor young Grownder, sinking into a settee and covering his face with his hands.

It was the same sad story at every club you entered; bereaved married men and deserted bachelors stood mopingly on the hearthrugs or flopped in limp despair on the big chairs. Every day the papers had been filled with advertisements and “pars” and articles about the College of Beauty; flaring posters, with pictures of a lady before and after a course at the College, covered London: the before lady had wild red hair, a pug nose, a heavy squint, one immense front tooth, lips like a negro’s, and the figure of a sack of potatoes; the after lady—supposed to be the same person—had a Grecian nose, great blue eyes, wavy brown hair, and an ideal figure. Every day the crisis became more grave; the great transatlantic lines had hired extra ships to fill with ladies proceeding to New York: it had been made “worth the while” of several eminent London physicians to prescribe a course of “New York.” The sight of a lady in the London streets was becoming more and more rare. Men in a hopeless state of dejection, even of melancholy

insanity, roved aimlessly about the pavements. The club-houses had to hire extra accommodation for men whose homes, bereft of the feminine element, had become loathsome and abhorrent to them.



“Posters.”

Beautiful suburban villas were left deserted, the dust growing visibly upon the furniture; domestic life among the upper and middle classes had ceased to exist. The milliners' shops were closed; suburban tradesmen were becoming bankrupt; feminine parts at the theatres were

played by youths as in old times, while the stalls and dress circle presented an unbroken line of wretched men, clad in tweed suits, dressing gowns—anything ; so demoralized does man become the instant the refining influence of woman is withdrawn.

There was another board meeting of the spinsters at Miss Cloot's. Their number was reduced by two recalcitrants, who had been unable to resist the New York fever and had deserted the ranks.

“ Idiots ! ” said Miss Cloot.

Miss Cloot rose at the head of the table and said,—

“ Ladies, I need hardly tell you that the operations of our society have been and are a complete success. In the course of another week there will not be a woman of any position, except ourselves, in the Metropolitan area. Our secretary, Miss McSwinger, will read to you the numbers of embarkations for New York for the week ending yesterday ; and Miss Gorgonia V. Nickerbocker, our New York factotum, is now present among us, and will set before you the statistics of the hiring and fitting up of new annexes of the College of Beauty, which at present accommodates four million seven hundred thousand and odd ladies.

“ You will recall to mind how, at our first and preliminary meeting, I said to you : ‘ What I have to say is, that if this College of Beauty set forth in this newspaper cutting does not exist, why it *shall* exist ; and we will create it.’ Whether the original College ever did exist I do not know, but *ours* does. Ladies, it was an idea such as has seldom occurred to woman since the beginning of time. You came wisely forward and threw in your money with mine to set this great work on foot ; our money has now gone ; but, by

reason of the term-foes paid by the pupils, the College is now entirely self-supporting.

“Now, ladies, is your time! All the pretty women have gone to New York; every month a certain number of men in this vast Metropolis suddenly decide to marry; for the last five months the deciders have lacked the item indispensable to the carrying out of their object—a woman to marry. The domestic arrangement which they calculated upon, and had prepared for in many cases even to the laying-in of Japanese fans, scent cases, hanging wardrobes, and other articles of furniture, has been hopelessly postponed.

“The aggregate of outstanding matrimonial decisions has, owing to the absence of a helpmate to join the board after allotment, become enormous.

“Ladies, those men *must* marry someone, or the scent-cases and wardrobes will lose their freshness: and they must marry US, or none. It may surprise you when I say that they will prefer even *you to none*: but you will find it is so!

“Ladies!” she continued, “we have triumphed! Do you hear the murmur without—the murmur of multitudes, like the ocean! It is the men! They know that eleven eligible spinsters—not to speak



“Wretched men.”

of our excellent factotum, Miss McSwinger, are assembled in this room. Look !”

In two strides she had reached the window curtains. She threw them back. Without, the whole square and adjacent streets were packed with a surging mass of stove-pipe hats.

As the curtains separated there arose a vast and deafening shout, while ten thousand hands simultaneously held aloft ten thousand wedding rings.



“The laying-in of Japanese fans.”

Miss Clout opened the window, and stepped out upon the balcony.

“Gentlemen!” she said, “I must entreat you to be patient and maintain order. It is impossible for us to accept all of you: I regret to inform you that twelve only amid your vast and imposing throng can be made happy. If you will disperse in an orderly way you can obtain Offer of Marriage forms, which I will ask you to fill up with

particulars of your stations in life, incomes, characters, and other details. I have made arrangements so that the forms can be obtained of any respectable chemist, bookseller, tobacconist, or house agent, or at the Army and Navy or Civil Service Stores.



“All applications will be considered, and the acceptations printed in the *Times*, *Pink 'Un*, *Matrimonial News*, and *Exchange and Mart*.

“I will now entreat you to disperse quietly without any demonstration. Good-day.”



“Miss Cloot stepped out upon the balcony.”

Three weeks from that time the twelve spinsters were married at St. George's. Miss Cloot had accepted a duke, seven other ladies earls, one a wealthy brewer, two pill millionaires, and the remaining one a poet laureate. Some time after, the ladies began to return from New York; whether they are any lovelier, I cannot say. Can woman be lovelier than she is? Never mind, I don't want a series of letters about it.

At any rate, those twelve ladies married at St. George's are all very, very happy; which shows that although beauty and goodness are inestimable gifts, wits are worth having.

THE UNBELIEVERS' CLUB.



THERE had been silence for twenty minutes in the circle of our weekly convivial at the "Chain-Harve." The last word had been "ghosts"—or, more accurately, "ghostes."

During the twenty minutes' silence, broken only by the puffing of pipes and the setting down of mugs, Mr. Coffin (who had been an undertaker, or something of that sort, up at London, and was considered the leading mind of the convivial club) had sat twinkling his eyes at the kettle-crane in a way that told those who knew him that something was to come out presently. At the end of the twenty minutes Peter broke the silence with :—

"He, he! Ghostes! Them's things as some folks thinks as ther' mebbe more in 'em ner is gen'ly thought—more'n wot some other folks thinks!"

Mr. Coffin transferred his twinkle to Peter, and then spread it over the company. But the company were engaged in twinkling for themselves—or, rather, in blinking (which was their substitute for twinkling)—at the kettle-crane. Most of them were wagging their heads very slowly from side to side.

“There’s some as don’t believe nothink,” said old Billet.

“An’ ’ow about Mrs. Skindle and them there lights down in the Low Medder?” said Peter.

“And ’ow about Master George’s groom?” said Mr. Armstrong, of the Mill.

“Ar!” murmured the company.

Mr. Coffin had now completed the spreading of his twinkle over the company, and spoke:—

“It seems to me, gentlemen, that this club has a sort of duty in this very matter of ghosts and things. There’s a great deal too much ignorance and superstition about.”

The company, added to by the dropping in of occasional new arrivals, transferred their gaze—no longer a blink—to Mr. Coffin, in feeble surprise. Then, very gradually, the slow wag of the heads dissolved into a slow nod; as they said, very thoughtfully, “Ar!”

“It isn’t only ghosts,” continued Mr. Coffin. “It’s superstition generally that it’s our duty to put our foot down against. There’s all sorts of nonsense about ill-luck from going under ladders, and spilling salt, and crossing knives—it’s a sheer disgrace to the century!”

“Ar!” said the company feebly.

“I’m glad you agree with me,” went on Mr. Coffin, “because I’ve always felt strongly about the foolishness of these superstitions. Now, I was reading the other day in

the paper about a club they have in London—it was there in my time, too; but that brought it to my mind. That club was established to ridicule those very superstitions; and they go at it with a vengeance when they are at it—regularly perspire over it, you might say. Well, now—why shouldn't we—this club—take up this matter too, just to show the people round about how sensible we are—eh?"

"Ar!" said the company.

"Very well, then, we couldn't have a more suitable occasion to inaugurate the new proceedings than to-night. This is Hallowe'en, gentlemen, the one night of the year on which people have the best chance of seeing ghosts—witches' night, you know; and what's more, there are just thirteen of us present, and that's another lucky thing; and what's more, Mr. Puter's yard dog has been howling all the evening, which is supposed to be a sign that somebody in this house will die shortly; and, by the way, I heard the death-watch most distinctly ticking in your parlour wall when I came in to-day, Peter; so, if you're as eager about the subject as I feel sure you are, why, there's no reason why we shouldn't begin at once."

"Why not?" murmured the company.

"Very well, then—those who are in favour of the new departure will indicate the same in the usual manner, by holding up their hands," said Mr. Coffin.

He turned his eye on each of the company in turn; and as he did so, the one gazed at feebly held up his hand, and then dropped it as quickly as possible.

They had failed to notice, before he pointed it out, that they numbered just thirteen. The attendance at the club

varied from time to time, owing to some of the frequenters living in the neighbouring villages, and to other reasons.

So Mr. Coffin called for two knives and a salt-cellar; and then each one present was blindfolded in turn and made to go through a ceremony of initiation over the crossed knives and to spill some salt; after which Mr. Coffin entertained them with a discourse about ghosts, rising gravestones, banshees, corpse-lights, and other things which it was the duty of the new club to ridicule.

“The time is approaching when the landlord will request us to leave the premises,” said Mr. Coffin; “and, as you are aware, the first of us to rise to depart must, according to the superstition, die within the year: a most laughable superstition, of course!”

Mr. Coffin looked around. Each one whom he fixed with his eye chuckled feebly and whispered “Ar—o’ course!”

“Who volunteers to rise first?” asked Mr. Coffin, fixing his twinkle on the kettle-crane.

There was a dead silence, broken by a low, blood-curdling, tremulous moan from the yard; a moan which swelled into a howl so prolonged that it seemed as though it would never cease. Then another dead silence, broken by a dreadful grating death-cry from the woods; only the cry of the screech-owl. Then the landlord looked in and said: “Time, gentlemen, please.”

But no one stirred; Mr. Coffin’s twinkle was still fixed upon the crane.

“I propose, brother Unbelievers,” he said, “that Peter, as being the person in whose house the death-watch is ticking at present, is the fittest person to rise. This will

give him a great opportunity of showing his contempt for absurd superstitions."

"That's right, anyhow—'ear! 'ear!" said the other eleven, quite heartily this time; and Peter desperately



"Time, gentlemen, please."

seized and emptied his glass of gin and water, and—pale as a sheet—slowly rose and buttoned his coat. As he did so, there resounded again, simultaneously, the howl of the yard dog and the death-cry of the screech-owl. Peter grinned a

ghastly grin, wiped his brow, said tremulously, "Well—goo' night," and crawled out.

Then Mr. Coffin removed his twinkle once more from the crane, and rose, and beamed round upon the company.

"This *is* a magnificent opportunity for the display of our contempt for superstition!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "If I remember rightly, it was on a Hallowe'en, just seven years ago, that the tramp hanged himself to that oak at the turn of the road—your way home, by the way, Mr. Armstrong. Yes, it *was* Hallowe'en! How fortunate! And then there's Master George's groom who was thrown and broke his neck at the Squire's gate, and is said to haunt the avenue just inside so as to be seen from the road. Why, if he's to be seen *any* night, he's safe to be about on Hallowe'en—and that's on *your* road home, Mr. Billet; there's a chance for *you*! Then some of you have to cross the Low Meadow where old Meg was drowned in the time of William the Fourth, and where the corpse-lights are to be seen, eh? Why, there's some fun for every one of you. There's the churchyard, too, with a lot of queer stories about it. Don't you remember about Joe Watts seeing that grey thing sitting on the grave that had been opened no one knew how?"

"Capital! I'll tell you what. Just come into my place and finish the evening, and then you can all start off in time to pass those places exactly at midnight. Come alone; and I'll start you all off at the right time."

Getting skilfully behind them all—for Peter had been found hanging about just outside the door of the "Chain-Harve")—he edged them into his cottage like a collie showing sheep into a pen; and made them all sit down;

and told them about an uncle of his who had gone by a haunted spot for all the world like the turn of the road where the tragedy of the tramp had occurred; and had heard something following him, though he could see nothing; and had felt a feeling like a dead fish sliding down



“Sprang out upon persons passing by.”

his back; and had been unable to stir from the spot or to turn his head, although he felt a something behind him all the time; and had been found nearly dead in the morning. Then there was another tale of a maniac with blood on his nails, who lurked behind headstones in just such a church-

yard as the one some of them had to pass through that night, and sprang out upon persons passing by; and was felt to be cold and slimy; and left those whom he touched paralyzed all down one side. And there was the story of the woman who saw a gravestone slowly rising—rising—rising of its own accord; and several other stories. Between the stories, in the dead silences, were heard the howls of the yard dog and the cries of the screech-owl: for Mr. Coffin lived close to the “Chain-Harve.”

“And now it’s about time for some of you to be off,” he said, rising. “You shall go one by one. Your road home lies by the Low Meadow, Peter; you’d better start now, and you’ll just get there as the clock strikes twelve—you’ll hear the church clock down there, so you can hang about a bit if you get there too soon. Good-night! Bless me, look at that thing in the elm tree! Doesn’t it look like a man hanging there? Oh, of course, that’s the light from my window on the leaves. Well, good-night, good-night all! Don’t forget the rising gravestones, and the maniac, and the groom, and the dead fish!”

When the last of them had got round the turn in the road Mr. Coffin put on his coat and crept out after them, walking on the turf at the side of the road so that his steps could not be heard. Presently he made a short cut across Farmer Worrip’s third field so as to head them. At the other end of the field was the tramp’s corner, with the fatal tree, now thin as to leaves, standing out blurrily against the dark sky. There, behind the hedge, Mr. Coffin waited to observe how Mr. Armstrong would pass the spot; Armstrong had been started off in good time to pass the spot a little before twelve; but the watcher waited in vain

—no Armstrong turned up. So Mr. Coffin started off again, across country, toward the churchyard, arriving there just before twelve, and hiding behind King John's Yew; he strained his ear for the sound of feet, but no sound of feet was to be heard. No one going by the road could possibly have arrived there before him. The clock struck twelve, but no one came; he waited until the quarter-past—still no one came. Then he started off, still across country, to a point on Peter's way home, some three-quarters of a mile beyond the Low Meadow—but no Peter was to be seen. So Mr. Coffin went home across the Low Meadow without meeting a soul—or a spirit. Even down at the Low Meadow he could hear the distant howl of the yard dog—a marrow-chilling sound enough; but Mr. Coffin had absolutely no nerves, and simply ehucked.

How the members of the Unbelievers' Club got home that night nobody ever knew except themselves; but next morning Mr. Coffin was on his pony making the round of their dwelling or working places, and interviewing them.

But they seemed very grumpy and short that morning (one and all): and on his ride home Mr. Coffin twinkled so at the hedges and the trees and the sky, and ehucked so incessantly, that even his pony (who was used to his ways) several times stopped and turned a brown eye round at its rider in surprise and inquiry. All that day twelve out of the thirteen members of the Unbelievers' Club were morose and out of humour; and that evening the majority of them happened to drop in at the "Threshing Machine," at the other end of the district from the "Chain-Harve." They said very little beyond "Good evening," and sat in the tap-

room looking sheepishly at the fire ; the important subject of the newly-established club being strangely avoided.

But reports of the prowess of the club on the previous night had been carefully spread by Mr. Coffin. He had told everybody he came across how Armstrong had sat and smoked right under the tramp's tree while the clock struck twelve, and how Billet had spent nearly an hour by the gate of the Squire's park, challenging the groom's ghost to show up, and making the avenue echo with his laughter ; and so forth : so that the members of the new club had become heroes. Thus, one by one, the villagers were attracted to drop in at the " Threshing Machine " to gaze reverentially at the fearless ghost-defiers, and ask them all about it.

" It must hav' give yer a bit of a creepy feelin' when the clock began to strike ? " said the saddler.

" Me ? Golong with yer ! 'Ope *I* ain't sech a turnip-liver as ter be frightened at bogies ! " replied Armstrong scornfully.

" Yur ! D'y'e take us for a set o' babies ? " asked Billet witheringly.

" Yah ! " exclaimed Joe Murzle. " Wot next ? "

Then the admirers stood drinks to the heroes ; and by the time the latter got up—with more or less difficulty—to go home, there wasn't one among them who would not have given a week's earnings to meet the most creepy ghost about.

But the next morning they were silent once more ; and Peter looked gloomily over the fence at Billet.

" Mighty queer about this 'ere pig o' mine, *that's* wot it is ! " said he. " Bin ailing, he has, ever since yesterday morning."

“Hum!” said Billet. “We-el—if you ask *me*—I tell yer plain as I do b’leeve my roomatics come on wuss night afore last, and that’s pat.”

Then they were silent, shaking their heads for several minutes.

“I’ll tell yer,” said Peter. “’Umbug it may be; an’



“Mighty queer about this 'ere pig o’ mine.”

truck it may be; but there’s things as is best let alone, and that I *do* think. Thur ain’t no kind o’ weak-mindyness nor credibility about *me*; but I says, wot’s the objeck o’ goin’ a-spillin’ o’ salt, an’ crossing knives, and settin’ down thirteen?”

“Ar!” said Billet eagerly, “that’s wot I ses—let

sleepin' dogs lie, ses I; and then yer won't git bitten, I ses!"

"I've got a kind o' notion as things are a-going somehow queerish like," said Armstrong, passing along the lane at that moment. "Do me if I can git the wind right way round into the mill-sails this mornin' nor yet yesterday; and what on earth shed make that there lot o' flour mouldy—well! That there pig's tail o' yourn don't look kind o' right—it's a-hanging out straight as a dip. Wot's ailin'?"

Peter and Billet looked at each other and shook their heads. Then Joe Maydew came along, and told how he had his doubts about them turkeys of his being quite as they should be, and how Jem Baker the carrier's horse had gone lame the day before; and how other suspicious things were happening,

Now, as a fact, Peter's pig had been ailing over a week, and the mill had been refractory for five or six days—ever since the wind had been so choppy; and Baker's horse had gradually gone lame from a shoe-nail badly driven ten days previously. But the "Club" had not been nervously looking out for evil signs until some thirty hours ago, and so had failed to find any particular significance in the mishaps.

"It strikès *me*," said Maydew (one of the Unbelievers' Club), "that there's folks as is fools and folks as is bigger fools; and these 'ere last kind is them as must go a-sneerin', and unb'leevin', and defyin', and temptin' o' Providence. Wot's Providence provide bad luck for, if you ain't free to 'elp yerself to it? An' how are yer goin' to 'elp yerself to it if ther' ain't no proper reckernized means o' doing of it—hey?"

“Do jest seem like throwin’ away the gifts o’ Providence, don’t it?” said Peter.

“And wot I ses, them as up and persuades others for to do that same, though bein’ nameless, is got to answer to it,” said Billet. “There’s things as we knows about, and there’s other things, as contrariwise, we don’t; and when you ses unluck, and ghostes, and sech—”

“All tomfoolery, aren’t they, Mr. Billet? and no one’s more convinced of that than you and Peter,” put in Mr. Coffin, who had come along unobserved, fixing his persuasive eye on Billet.

The influence of Mr. Coffin’s eye was remarkable: poor Billet and Peter stood on one foot and then on the other, and grinned feebly, while the other two stood scratching their ehins; and, with a cheery wave of the hand, Mr. Coffin passed on; and when he was out of sight those four stuek their fists defiantly into the very bottoms of their poekets, and put their legs wide apart, and muttered: “Is got to arnswer for it; and it’s a merey if there ain’t bad luck for *them*.”

For the rest of that week the Unbelievers spent their time in detecting signs of the ill-luck brought upon them by the rash proceedings of that fatal evening; for, in truth, they were as superstitious a set as one could well find. By the end of the week a thousand small misfortunes had happened, exactly on a footing with the small misfortunes which had been happening to them every week of their lives; but now these desperate deeds at the “Chain-Harve” caused everything.

Peter’s pig got so ill that Peter was forced to sell it at less than quarter value to the local butcher, who was forced

to send the carcase to London to dispose of it; and then Peter—always feeble-minded—began to grow moody and to



“He set fire to his thatch.”

stand about brooding on ills to come; and while he stood brooding with a candle in his hand he set fire to his thatch and burned off half his roof.

Then the evening came round for the weekly meeting of the "Unbelievers' Club," and Mr. Coffin sat in state in the club-room chair, at the "Chain-Harve"; but at half-past seven (the regulation time for dropping in) not a member appeared, nor at a quarter past eight; and then Mr. Coffin set off for the other end of the parish, and found them all at the "Threshing Machine."

"Ha! Good evening, gentlemen!" said he, taking a big chair by the fire. "So you've decided to hold our club meeting here for a change?"

"'Ear! 'ear!" cried all those who were not of the fated twelve. Then came a ten minutes' silence. Then Armstrong said, doggedly,—

"As to clubs, there's clubs as is all right; and there's clubs as is, what you might say, otherwise—an' that's all about it!"

"Ar! That's jest where it is!" said old Billet.

"An' take it or leave it!" added Joe Maydew.

"Ar!" said the rest.

Peter sat in a dark corner, behind a string of onions, muttering to himself.

"Is it your pleasure, fellow Unbelievers, that we go into committee on the future programme of the club?" asked Mr. Coffin.

"'Ear! 'ear!" cried the curious non-members, eagerly.

But Armstrong rose and stuck his fists again into the bottoms of his pockets, and glared at the proposer.

"W'y, if it comes to that, no, it ain't!" he said, fiercely. "And take it out o' that!" And with that he stamped out of the "Threshing Machine," followed by Joe Maydew.

The non-members were terribly disappointed; Mr.

Coffin's influence was powerless to set the proceedings going; the affair was a disastrous frost; and presently the party broke up. At the hour for closing Peter still sat in the dark corner behind the string of onions, rocking his chair on its two hind legs and glowering at his boots; and he had to be nudged three times before he started up and mechanically trudged out, with his eyes fixed on the floor.

Next day, at the time for going to work, Peter sat in his living room with his chin upon his chest, and refused to budge. He had not attempted to repair the thatch of his roof; and the rain had soaked his bed, and spoilt his one or two books, and the coloured prints on his wall and other things; but he merely gazed hopelessly round like one under an irremovable curse, and gave it up. He had left the cover off his little flour-tub, and the rain had soaked the flour, and a hen was scratching in it; but there he sat and glowered.

Then he lost his employment at Farmer Worripp's, for the farmer could not wait his pleasure, and had to engage another hand instead; and so Peter had to go to the "house" for out-door relief. So he dragged on, wandering round his garden patch, with his head low, and glowering, and brooding, and waiting for the further developments of the ill-luck he had brought on himself by the proceedings at the "Club."

Then his landlord grew tired of receiving no rent, and Peter had to leave his cottage, after selling his few "sticks" to his neighbours; or, rather, after his neighbours had come forward and given him a trifle for this and that article which he would otherwise have left behind without an attempt to sell.

And so he wandered out into the road quietly, at dusk, when no one was observing; and stood for a moment at his gate, wavering which way to go; and then he turned at the sound of a dog barking, and went off slowly in the direction to which he had turned, with no pack—nothing but his clothes and the small amount from the sale in his pocket.

As he passed the "Chain-Harve," his head still on his breast, Mr. Coffin (who had been away for ten days, and had not heard of Peter's latest straits) was standing in the doorway and caught sight of him.

"Halloa, Master Peter," said Coffin. "Whither away now? Coming in to have half a pint?"

Peter suddenly stopped in the light from the tap-room window, raised his head, and glared fiercely at the speaker: then spat on the ground before him, and disappeared into the darkness.

The next morning when Mr. Coffin heard all about Peter's recent troubles, he set off along the road the way he had gone, and searched for him high and low. Peter had been seen in the next village, and had bought a loaf and some cheese at the grocer's; but beyond this the seeker could not trace him. He tried the next day, and the next; but with no success.

It was eight or nine weeks after this that, at sunset, Peter dragged himself from under a haystack where he had been asleep, and drew himself slowly up to a standing position. He was scarcely recognizable: his unwashed face was seared and lined with exposure, misery, and incessant brooding on the ill-luck which had long ago developed in his feeble mind into a crushing curse—a curse deliberately brought down upon himself by some awful and

inexpiable blasphemy—for such was the phantasy which had evolved itself out of those harmless acts of spilling the salt and so forth at the inauguration of the Unbelievers' Club. Day and night—until he had fallen down with sheer inability to keep awake—he had wandered on, with his chin on his chest and his eyes on the road, brooding over the “blasphemy” and the “curse.” He looked like a skeleton; his eyes had grey hollows all round; his clothes were in rags; and he had been wet through for many days.

Suddenly, now, he glared at the setting sun; then sprang forward to a heap of flints on the roadside, and with trembling hands eagerly selected a large stone, and hugged it up inside the breast of his coat. Then he set off hurriedly—almost at a run—along the road; and walked, walked, at the same pace, into the dusk, into the darkness, under the stars. Now and again he would take out the flint and feel it caressingly; and once he suddenly stopped, tore off a large piece of his coat, wrapped the stone in it, tied his old red handkerchief over that, and put the stone back in his coat. Stumbling along at the same pace, he arrived about ten o'clock at the window of the “Threshing Machine,” and peered in; everyone was away that night at a merrymaking in the next village, and Mr. Coffin sat alone in the tap-room.

Peter pushed open the tap-room door, and suddenly appeared before Mr. Coffin, who started up in surprise. After a few moments' scrutiny he recognized the changed figure, advanced and touched its arm, and sat it down in a chair; and went out and returned with some bread and cheese and a mug of ale.

Peter pushed away the food and swallowed the pint of

ale at a gulp, then held out the mug to be refilled. It was strong ale, not "swipes." Mr. Coffin took the mug and set it down; and while his back was turned Peter seized his untouched glass of hot rum and water and swallowed the liquor.

Not once did Peter speak, even in reply; but each time



“ He walked into the darkness.”

the other turned his back, he would bring out the flint in its wrappings and caress it, and glare at Mr. Coffin. Then suddenly Peter sprang up and tottered out; and Mr. Coffin, after a vain attempt to find him in the darkness outside, mounted his pony and took the lane for the Low Meadow; and after him, keeping on the grass or in the soft mud, crept Peter, caressing the flint stone.

Mr. Coffin did not return home that night, although his pony did; and the next day he was found on the Low Meadow with his skull fractured and a large sharp flint lying close by; and Peter was found lying face upwards, glaring at the sky through three feet of water, at the spot where tradition said that old Meg was drowned in the time of William the Fourth.

The Low Meadow is triply haunted now; and the villagers avoid it after nightfall more carefully than ever. The Unbelievers' Club exists no longer.

THE JUDGE'S PENANCE



YOUR

crime," said Lord Justice Pimblekin, "is the most heartless, atrocious, inhuman, and horrible that it has ever been my misfortune to hear of: your long and cold-blooded premeditation; the

cynical indifference to the result of your atrocities, combined with the delight with which you have wallowed in human gore; your contempt for all the dictates of honesty, truth, pity, and good faith; your greed, ingratitude, treachery, savageness, meanness, and cannibalism; all these things stamp you as the most atrocious,

unmitigated and loathsome scoundrel, savage, monster, and vampire that ever wallowed in the foul and fathomless quagmire of infinite and immeasurable dastardliness.

"Under these circumstances I ought to inflict upon you the severest penalty which the law allows. I say it is my unmistakable duty to sentence you to penal servitude for life, with the cat once a week.

"Mercy would be thrown away upon you.

"Under these circumstances I will disregard my palpable



THE END

duty, and render the whole proceedings a farce, by sentencing you to a fine of forty shillings, or a month."

The fine being immediately paid, the prisoner left the court amid the congratulations of his friends.



New laurels were added to the already superfoliated wreath of Lord Justice Pimblekin by this fresh masterpiece of judicial wisdom. He was already the most renowned of all the judges on the Bench, and the admiration and envy of the whole judicial and forensic body.

His verdicts had a character of their own; the severity of his denunciation of inextenuable crime was only equalled by the inadequacy of the punishment dealt out; as he explained on each occasion, he never did his duty.

He designed a mixture of justice, equity, and mercy; only he left out the first two ingredients. After the mental strain of that historical verdict recounted above, his lordship took a holiday. He had an offer of a seat in a balloon which was about to ascend, and accepted. The machine ascended successfully from



his lordship's ground, sailed majestically out to sea, and disappeared in the distance.

With the utmost anxiety the whole community waited for further news of the balloon; but none arrived. Either the eminent judge had been picked up by a passing ship bound for some remote parts, or he had perished.

A year passed without news; and it was then decided to erect a cenotaph to his lordship in Westminster Abbey.

One evening some time after this decision, Jemmy Wedge and Bill Slinker the eminent burglars sat in their humble room near the Mint, arranging the final details of a burglary dated for the following evening. Jemmy's eye, glancing casually round the room, perceived a dim figure standing in a dark corner. With a strong expression of disapproval Jemmy jumped to his feet and sprang towards the intruding eavesdropper; but stopped suddenly with an



ejaculation of surprise as he recognized the well-known and revered features of Lord Justice Pimblekin!



A flood of contending emotions welled up in the mind of Jemmy Wedge—rage at the overhearing of his plans by an intruder, and that intruder an administrator of the law; fear of the consequences; inveterate and deep-rooted affection for the judge who had so often saved him from the well-merited penalties of crime; surprise, wonder.

His arm, raised to fell the eavesdropper, sank impotently to his side : he gasped and stared.

“ You need have no anxiety,” said Lord Justice Pimblekin in a strange, hollow, far-off voice, “ your secret is safe with me. I will not blow the gaff.”

These words, spoken with the quiet judicial accent which Jemmy knew so well, yet in the far-off tone mentioned above, made Jemmy’s eyes rounder than ever with wonderment.

No word of slang had ever before passed the lips of the judge : for slang might indeed be unintelligible to a judge who knew not what a race-course was, and would ask in Court, “ What is the ‘ Stock Exchange ’—is it a cattle market ? ”

Lord Justice Pimblekin’s head was drooped hopelessly upon his bosom ; and he now covered his face with his



trembling hands, while a bright tear crept out between his fingers as he murmured in a quivering voice, “ I am one of you now ! I’m a pal—that’s what I am ; straight, and no kid, my pippin ! ” The painful effort with which these words were uttered was apparent in his whole frame. He had not finished speaking ; he was obviously struggling with another word, which threatened to choke him. With an expression of horror and despair, he clutched his bald head ; and then the word came—the single word “ Blimey ! ” It was uttered in the same soft, mincing, judicial accents.

Then his lordship moved across the room and, sitting upon the table near the fire, drew out a short dirty clay pipe, lit it at the candle, and sat puffing at it ; an occasional tear still creeping down his furrowed cheek.

"You may proceed with your deliberations with a perfect sense of security," he said anon. "Djeer, old pal? I ain't goin' to give yer away."

Every phrase of this kind evidently inflicted upon the unfortunate judge the most acute pain.

"To convince you how little you have to apprehend from me," he continued, "I may inform you that I shall never again occupy my former judicial position; in fact, I am incapacitated from doing so by the fact that I am a GHOST!"



Now, Jemmy Wedge and Bill Slinker were superstitious and nervous to a degree, as most burglars are; and at that announcement their hair rose, and they stood gazing at the speaker with glaring eyes and chattering teeth.

"I am sorry to cause you such alarm," said the spectre, "and assure you I should only be too happy to go; but I cannot—it is not permitted me to do so."

"The balloon in which I ascended was found to have some defect in the valve, which made it impossible to descend; consequently, after rising to a great altitude, it burst, hurling myself and the three other occupants of the

car into the sea. I was unfortunately drowned—a most terrible loss to society! The three others were drowned also; but, as they were neither judges nor counsel, but merely ordinary persons liable to be called as jurors or witnesses, their loss need not further concern us. If they had survived, they would have been subsequently killed at some time or other by their treatment in court.



“Well, I found myself floating among the disembodied spirits in space; and I became conscious that certain of those in my vicinity were eyeing me askance and whispering together in a menacing and most disturbing manner—” At this point the spectre broke down for a moment, and sobbed audibly, his emotion culminating in the words, “Strike me pink!” He then proceeded: “You must excuse this emotion—the whole thing has been too much for me—djeeer?— in a most menacing and disturbing manner. Now and again these threatening spirits would beckon to their circle certain of those that passed; and these joined them in their minative demonstrations until, knock me funny! if the whole rabble did not surround me, covering me with vituperation. I gleaned from the evidence before me that they were innocent persons who had suffered in consequence of the inadequate punishments I had dealt out to various criminals during my

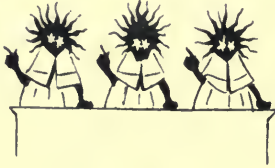
judicial career. There was a woman who had been murdered by her husband after his release from the seven days I had given him for breaking both her arms and legs; here were seven babies who had been made away with by another malefactor in his joy at escaping with one month



for kicking a policeman to death. There were several hundreds of persons who had succumbed to the practices of a purveyor of diseased meat to the London markets who was an especial protégé of mine and whom I always—after the most scathing comments on his villainy—let off with a fine; and so forth.

“These indignant spectres dragged me before three spirits who acted as judges in those parts, and who, as I understood, had formerly been Mahatmas when living; and these, after hearing the evidence before the court, pronounced upon me the most—s’elp me beans!—a most terrible sentence. I was condemned to return to earth as a ghost, and there remain until the evil consequences of my lapses

of duty had fully worked themselves out. This, they calculated, would amount to a sentence of about seven thousand years. There was no



option of a fine, while my request for leave to appeal for a mandamus was dismissed with costs. My sentence also provided that I should be compelled to assist in all the crimes resulting from my own leniency, and should be powerless to prevent them by warning the sufferers or the authorities. And," concluded the unhappy spectre, sobbing aloud,



" here I am, s'elp me ! "

The two burglars were really touched, for they had loved Lord Justice Pimblekin as a true and valuable friend. They knew him to have been an old gentleman whose abhorrence of the vulgarity of crime had been equalled by his sensitive horror of illiterate, vulgar, or slangy speech : and they thus, to a certain extent, understood the painful nature of his present position ; for the involuntary use of the idiom and ways of the society in which he was now condemned to mix was a part of his sentence.

Far into the night the judge sat smok-



ing his short spectral pipe and drinking from an unsubstantial pewter pot, while he listened, shuddering, to the

plans of the two burglars for the carrying out of their crime. With growing horror he gradually gleaned that the crib to be cracked was the house of his twin brother the Bishop of Hampstead, a lonely mansion near the village of Highgate:

He watched the two malefactors as they cleaned and loaded their revolvers and made other preparations for the expedition. If that judge had done his duty, these two would still have been working out their time for the last crime but seven which they had committed; whereas Lord Pimblekin had let them off for that job with three months, and visited their subsequent deeds with penalties which decreased at a constant ratio, until for the latest — burglarious entry, removal of property valued at £500, wilful destruction of other property valued at £5000, and maiming of two policemen and one footman—he had given them seven days.



Now, it happened that there had been for the last year or so before the disappearance of Justice Pimblekin a disagreement of a somewhat painful nature between himself and his twin brother the Bishop of Hampstead.

Both were old gentlemen of the utmost purity and philanthropy of principle, to whom the injuring of anyone — especially a brother — would have been an idea of the utmost horror.

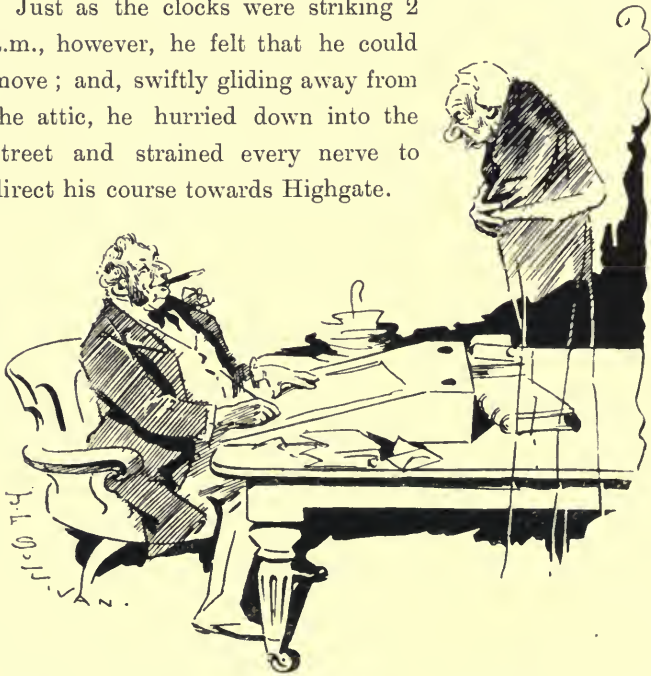


Besides this, their mutual affection was really very strong; but they had quarrelled about a matter of principle—a mere trifle: whether a piece of toast should be buttered

on the right or left side ; and their feelings had become temporarily embittered.

This painful circumstance naturally increased the horror of the unhappy spectre at the present plans of the burglars, and he made the wildest efforts to go to his brother and warn him ; but he was glued to the table.

Just as the clocks were striking 2 a.m., however, he felt that he could move ; and, swiftly gliding away from the attic, he hurried down into the street and strained every nerve to direct his course towards Highgate.



But every effort was vain ; he was drawn, against his will, to a house where an habitual criminal whom his lordship had let loose upon society was engaged in preparing poisoned food for a family.

Having assisted in the mixing of the poison, he passed on and found himself in a room with a swindling company-

director whom he had let off with six months instead of fifty years ; and here he assisted in the drawing up of a new prospectus specially designed for the benefit of the widow and the fatherless who might happen to have a mite or two to be relieved of.

By this time it was morning ; and the judge's ghost found himself in a shed where that diseased-meat purveyor whom he had alluded to was busy packing for the market ; and the ghost helped with advice.

All that day he wandered from one criminal to another, from one victim to another ; and the following night he once more joined the two burglars Jemmy and Bill at the carriage-gate of the residence of the Bishop of Hampstead. Convulsed with inexpressible grief, the spectre advised the stretching of wires across the lawn to trip up pursuers ; then struggling madly against the words which he was forced to utter, he offered, as a ghost, to glide in through the walls and discover the most vulnerable fastenings ; an offer which the two burglars eagerly and gratefully accepted. After this the judge's ghost pointed out where the plate was kept, and assisted in chloroforming the butler and stealing the key ; and then he led the way to the cabinet in which the Bishopess of Hampstead kept her jewels, and kept watch while it was forced and the valuables were extracted.

All three had safely reached the library on their way out, when a piercing scream rang through the house ; it was the scream of the spectre's sister-in-law the bishopess, who had just awoke and discovered the loss of the jewels ; and in another moment the bishop in his night-cap and slippers stood before them.

He was a brave bishop, and was in the act of felling

Jemmy Wedge with a poker, when he recognized his brother; and the weapon fell from his hand, giving Jemmy a chance of whipping out his revolver and firing. The bishop fell; and the judge's ghost and he were left alone. Beside himself with despair, the ghost bent over his brother and tried to weep; but he felt that he was grinning from ear to ear and chuckling derisively. The wounded bishop slowly opened his eyes and gazed at him in grief and horror.



“Peter!” he gasped.

“He, he!” said the ghost. “We’re quits now. I said I would round on you, old pal! You’ve got it now.” Then straining every agonized nerve to prevent it, the judge’s ghost began to jig round the prostrate bishop and snap his fingers and hop lightly over him.

The other members of the family and the servants had collected and were gazing upon the scene: Mrs. Bishop glared at the ghost, uttered the word “Peter!” screamed another piercing scream, and swooned.



They carried the bishop and the bishopess upstairs and sent for a doctor, while the members of the family stood around the judge’s ghost, gazing upon him with indignation and repugnance. In a hurried consultation they agreed that it would never do to hand him over to the police, as such a family scandal was not to be thought of.

“Do not loathe me,” said the unfortunate spectre; “I am only a ghost!”

“A ghost!” cried the family in chorus; “a nice subterfuge! You expect us to believe that, of course? Go! Let us never see your face again!”



Slowly and with downcast eyes the ghost crept out through the bookcase and rejoined Jemmy and Bill to assist in

disposing of the swag. They lavished upon him terms of endearment, and insisted on treating him at every public-house in the neighbourhood; and the sight of that respectably-dressed old gentleman with kid gloves and a short clay pipe surprised the pot-boys. The ghost could not consume the liquor, being too unsubstantial. At short intervals he would retire into a dark corner to beat his breast in remorse and anguish.

Presently Jemmy and Bill, who had been whispering earnestly together, turned respectfully to the spectre; they appeared very nervous, as though afraid to broach some delicate matter which was on their minds.

“Beg parding, boss—I mean my lordship”—began Jemmy, hesitatingly, and fidgeting from one foot to the other; “but we was a-going to ask yer if as how you’d ’ave enny objection—”

“Yus,” chimed in Bill. “If ye’d take the ’uff if so be as we was to—”

“Dry up, you, Bill,” said Jemmy. “It’s just this ’ere, guvnor. We was a-thinkin’ of crackin’ another crib next week as yer might ha’ heered ov in yer time—well, to bust

out with it straight and candid, it's yer own crib as used to be w'en yer was alive ; but, yer see, bein' as how ye're dead now and it ain't o' no more good to yer—there's a nice little lot of old plate as you've got there as we sho'd be proud to 'andle. The on'y thing is—”

“ Yus, that's we're it is,” interrupted Bill. “ The on'y thing is as we might 'ave to knock yer missis—axin' pardon ; 'er ladyship—on the 'ed, bein' a light sleeper, her maid ses, and a bit ov a spitfire, d'ye see ? ”

The judge's ghost attempted to give vent to a cry of indignant horror and forbid the attempt in the most unequivocal way. He struggled to rush forth and inform the police and the community ; but he heard himself chuckle and felt himself slap the two burglars on the back, and knew that he was saying to them : “ Heave ahead, my bloaters ! I owe the old Dutch one for the naggings she's treated me to. I'm on this job, that's what I am ! ” And then he puffed away at his short clay, and kept on chuckling until he felt quite sick with misery.

“ He's the right sort, so he is,” said Bill, “ and no two ways abaat it.”

“ Right yer are,” said Jemmy. “ 'E's the sort o' pal for me, and no error.”

Once more the judge's ghost wandered about from one malefactor to another, and from one victim to another ; always assisting the malefactors and jeering the victims, and always welcome as a friend by the former, and cursed as an enemy by the latter. He had no rest night or day ; he was constantly racked and harrowed by some new shock of grief or repugnance.

The thing got noised about ; how the eminent and respected

judge Lord Justice Pimblekin had not been killed in his balloon adventure, but had returned to the country and, disregarding all his old associations of morality, refinement, and respectability, was herding with criminals of the lowest type, and indulging in the most nefarious and vulgar practices.

At this time it was his fate to appear at a select meeting of the directors of that Widows' and Orphans' Fleecing Corporation, Limited, the prospectus of which he had assisted in drawing up. His presence at first filled the directors with the gravest alarm; but when the promoter explained how greatly his lordship had changed, they unanimously appointed him chairman. It was passingly suggested that his lordship's growing evil reputation might prejudice the concern in the eyes of the public; but the promoter, who knew the public well, reassuringly explained that investors were so hopelessly idiotic that a board composed entirely of burglars would not prevent their investing so long as the prospectus contained sufficiently impossible promises of profit; so the ghost of Lord Pimblekin officiated as chairman and assisted in causing several suicides.

Then the night came for the cracking of his own crib; and he continued to give vent to a succession of boisterous chuckles every one of which nearly killed him; only a ghost is a difficult thing to kill. Arrived at his palatial suburban residence, he directed the burglars to the outhouse where the ladders were kept; and the three ascended to her ladyship's dressing-room where the jewels were. The door between the dressing-room and her ladyship's bedroom being open, the ghost undertook to stand over her with a phantom bludgeon to prevent any noise in

the event of her waking. She woke, stared at his lordship, looked at the burglars at work at her bureau, gazed once more at the ghost with a look which froze him, murmured "Peter," and sank back with closed eyes.

Half mad with misery, the ghost directed the burglars to the plate and other valuables; and then looked on chuckling while they tore the silk curtains, jumped on her ladyship's favourite violin, ripped the carpet with a clasp-knife, cut the throat of the pug, and twisted the necks of the canaries and linnets and doves.

Then they left quietly; and, as the ghost followed them out, he was conscious of an immaterial form similar to his own standing at his side. "Come with me," said the form; and they whirled through space until they arrived in the same court in which sentence

had been passed upon him. The three Mahatmas were still sitting on the bench, and the chief Mahatma said:—

"Prisoner, your case is one of the worst which it has ever been our painful task to pass sentence upon. Your reckless disregard of what you recognized as your duty and of the consequences of your misdemeanours on the bench render mercy in your case entirely out of place. It is our duty to give you the benefit of the full seven thousand years to which you have been sentenced; we will, however, release you on your own recognizances and allow you to return to earthly existence and again fill your former judicial sphere, with a view to observing how you go on for the future. You will be bound over to come up for judgment if called upon."



Instantly our judge found himself in the flesh once more, and robing for his accustomed seat on the bench. His reappearance caused great surprise, as his evil reputation was now public property and the authorities had removed his cenotaph from Westminster Abbey and sold it to a rag-shop.

However—as it is impossible to remove a judge from the bench even if he murders the Queen, the Royal Family, and the Bench of Bishops, steals the watches of the whole Houses of Lords and Commons, and even defrauds the Inland Revenue—Lord Justice Pimblekin was allowed to remain on the bench; and, as he was a socially influential person, bygones were allowed to be bygones.

But he was a reformed judge. He did his duty, and gave irredeemable criminals what they deserved; fraudulent company directors got the cat, and diseased meat purveyors a lifer, until there was hardly any crime left. Lord Justice Pimblekin's twin brother and wife recovered, and forgave him; and his lordship has not been called up for judgment yet.



The Man with a Malady.



THE only silent person at our table d'hôte was a very tall careworn man who passed nearly every dish offered to him, and played with such scraps as he did take as if unaware of

their presence on his plate. He sat with knitted brows, painfully preoccupied and obviously brooding. The comfortable German next to him, who sat with both elbows on the table, picking his teeth with one hand and ladling spoonfuls of chopped-up meat into his mouth with the other, tried to draw him into conversation in well-masticated English ; but the thin man replied either monosyllabically or not at all.

But suddenly, while the German, with many snorts and gurgles was sucking in an ice from a spoon the bowl of which rested in the palm of his hand—his elbow being, of course, always on the table—the silent man suddenly turned to him and said :—

“ I think you had better begin to see about packing your portmanteau—you will have to do it in such a hurry after the telegram arrives.”

“ Telechram ? ” said the German, the words, the ice, and a gulp of wine all struggling for mastery in his throat. “ Vvat telechram ? Vvich telechram ? ”

“ Oh ! about your warehouse in Hamburg, you know—the fire in it—” Then he broke off suddenly, and said : “ Ah—I forgot—I was only thinking aloud.”

The German choked, gulped, snorted, and sputtered—even more than he had during the meal ; but his ejaculatory inquiries failed to elicit anything more from his neighbour ; and at length, stuffing a fig, a piece of cheese, some bread, and some wine all at once into his mouth, he tore the table-napkin from his collar, and choked indignantly out of the room.

During the next day I did not come across the thin man. In the middle of the night following I was violently waked by a heavy stamping and a stentorian shouting in the corridors ; this was followed by loud chokes and gurgles, which died away down the stairs and were heard again on the front steps—and I knew the German was departing by the night train. Next morning at breakfast I heard from the waiter that the German had gone to Hamburg in consequence of a telegram he had received. He had appeared greatly excited and upset, and the “ boots ” had heard him talking excitedly to himself about a fire.

That evening, as in duty bound, I stepped over to the Casino ; in the peristyle I found the thin man, with his arms behind him, walking very slowly backwards and forwards ; the cigar between his teeth being hopelessly out,

and unnoticed. Suddenly he flung away the cigar and hurried into the theatre; but he did not seem to hear the concert, and as the music ceased he started up, muttering to himself, "Let's go and see that fellow lose his seven thousand pounds!" and hurried away feverishly to the tables. He walked straight to the second roulette table on the right, where a visitor was engaged in staking little piles of gold pieces—twenty little piles at a time. That time he won on his tallest pile, staked on a full number, making a considerable addition to the heap he had already won.

"I should advise you to stop *now*," murmured the thin man, standing by his chair; but the plunger merely stared at him and resumed his placing of little piles all over the table.

"Hum! of course, if you *will* do it," muttered the thin man. "But don't say I didn't warn you!"

Zero turned up; and the plunger (who despised the even chances) lost all his little piles: but on he went again—full numbers, full transversals, carré à cheval; and again zero turned up, and away went the little piles. Then the plunger placed a very tall pile on zero—and zero did *not* turn up; and so he went on until his heap had disappeared, and he had changed note after note, and lost all the change. Then he slowly rose, glared at the thin man, grinned a ghastly grin at the nearest croupier, and disappeared. (I subsequently heard that he had lost seven thousand pounds.)

The thin man was becoming interesting to me. He placed a 5f. piece on "manque": "manque" won; twice more on the same, which won; then twice on "passe," which won. Fifteen or twenty times he staked on the even chances, and never failed to win. Then he placed on black

the fifteen or twenty 5f. pieces he had won, saying to a croupier, "I'll lose those": and black lost. He then placed his original piece on a full number—15: 15 won. He left the 175f. he had won on the table and placed his 5f.

piece on 9: and 9 turned up.

By this time the other players had begun to notice him. He placed a limit stake on the 1; several



"He never failed to win."

persons followed him and staked there: 1 turned up. Twice he repeated the action on other numbers—and others followed him—and the numbers won. The croupiers interchanged glances, and said a few words to one another. Then one of the chefs got off his high chair, and went round to speak to the winner; but the winner was not there; his stakes and winnings, however, were still on the table, where

he had left them. The chef went round the rooms to look for the thin man, but he was nowhere to be found. I had seen him quietly retire as the croupier had cried "One!" and quietly walk out of the rooms.

Next morning, after breakfast, the thin man was smoking a cigar on the hotel terrace, and an irresistible curiosity forced me to speak to him.

"I must congratulate you on your luck last night," I said.

"Luck, sir!" repeated the thin man, without removing his gaze from the pavement. His voice was hollow and dismal in the extreme—utterly without hope. "No luck about it at all, except bad luck—deuced bad luck, sir!"

"You certainly did not appear to attach much value to your success, to judge by your leaving your stakes and winnings as you did. I presume you are *aware* that you won a considerable sum?"

"Aware? Oh, perfectly."

"And you do not call that luck?"

"I do not call it luck, simply because it is *not* luck, and luck has nothing to do with it," replied the thin man, turning his gaze gloomily on me. "It is certainty, that's all. I happen, I am very sorry to say, to *know* what number will turn up."

"What, always?"

"Yes, always—confound it! That's what's the matter with me, sir! Do you think I should have left my comfortable home and come among a lot of jabbering foreigners if my confounded doctor hadn't ordered me to? Do I look like it, sir?"

"Well, no; I must admit you don't. I trust your health will be speedily re-established, at any rate."

“Not it, sir. When one’s fool enough to go and get one of these symptoms which the doctors haven’t come across before, one doesn’t easily get rid of it. I shouldn’t wonder



“I tell you it’s a disease, sir.”

if this beastly knowledge of the future were to hang about me for—”

“Knowledge of the future? Surely that can hardly be classed as a disease?” I said.

“ Oh, can't it, though? The deuce it can't, sir! It's abnormal, isn't it? Very well, what's abnormal's a disease, isn't it? ”

“ But,” I said, “ it—is it not a very—an extraordinarily unusual ailment to suffer from? ”

“ Of course it is,” replied the thin man; “ and doesn't that make it all the worse? ”

“ But what does it spring from? ”

“ Why, from the fashionable, up-to-date complaint—nervous exhaustion. Overwork, sir, resulting in super-excitation of the cerebral tissues—or some jargon of that sort. I tell you it's a disease, sir: the ancient seers suffered from it, I suppose: anyhow, *I* do, and that's enough for *me*! And I came away to get rid of it by change of air.”

“ Pray forgive me,” I said, “ but your case is so very peculiar and interesting that I am impelled to ask how this ailment first manifested itself.”

“ Oh!—usual thing. I felt tired and depressed—couldn't sleep—had no energy—couldn't fix my thoughts. Then one day when somebody asked me whether I thought the fine weather was likely to last I surprised myself by saying ‘ No; it will begin to rain at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, and keep on all night.’ I *knew* it would, sir; and when my prophecy turned out correct, my feelings were mixed, sir.

“ First I was surprised—then frightened—then glad; but on the whole fright prevailed. It wasn't comfortable, sir; and I tried to believe it was all nonsense; but events *would* turn out as I foresaw, and conviction was forced upon me.

“ Now, sir, I daresay you think, ‘ What a wonderful power to possess! What a magnificent advantage!’ *Is* it?

Take my word for it, you'd have a different opinion if you actually suffered from it. Advantage, sir! Do you consider it an advantage to foresee a lot of miserable and horrible things which are destined to happen to you years hence, and to look forward to them and brood upon them all the time until they happen? It's bad enough to remember a past misfortune if its effects continue, but it's a confounded deal worse to foresee one, and see it getting bigger and bigger like an express train advancing from the distance to smash you like a fly!

"Eh—what? 'Certain worldly advantages attached to the disease.' What's the good of them, sir, when you know what's going to happen to you? I don't want wealth, sir; shouldn't know what to do with it if I had it. I'm well enough off for all *my* requirements: and I don't want power, sir—nor influence; I want to be quiet and jog along—and how the deuce can a man afflicted with the gift of prophecy be quiet and jog along? I tell you, my knowledge of my future is like a nightmare; and it makes me nasty and vindictive; and the only use I care to put my ailment to is to worry people out of their wits. You, sir, for instance, would be deuced uncomfortable—and that's putting it pretty mildly—if I were to tell you what will happen to you just about this date three years hence. I'll spare you that; and you have reason to be very thankful to me."

I began a smile of amused incredulity: but somehow it would not work! I tilted my hat a little to one side, and gave my cigar a jaunty cock to show my indifference; but I very soon put my hat straight again and allowed my cigar to fall into its usual serious position. I turned away from

the thin man and sauntered into the reading-room, took up *Galignani*, and sat down ; and it took five minutes to reveal to me the fact that I was holding the newspaper upside down.

Then I got up resolutely and went out again to the thin man, and, staring boldly at him, began : " I shall take it as a favour if you will tell me," but here my voice somehow seemed to die of inanition, and I finished up with " the time."

The thin man chuckled inside him in a Mephistophelean way which told me he knew well enough that I had not come to ask the time. With a sudden violent resolve not to be a fool, I began to talk again about his affair at the table.

" You must have puzzled them considerably over there," I said.

" I have," he replied. " The administration fellows are talking the matter over now in a pretty state of mind ! One of them will call on me here this afternoon with a cheque for my winnings, and an inquiry as to what I propose to do. Of course they've long ago grasped the fact that I can smash the entire concern if I choose ; but my conduct has puzzled them. I could have broken the bank at every table if I had liked last night—but that's not my object. I want to tease them. If you're curious, you may as well be present at our interview."

I accepted eagerly—anything to distract my mind. After lunch I went up with the thin man to his room ; and within fifteen minutes the porter came to say that a gentleman wished to speak with the thin man.

" Show him up," said the latter.

The visitor entered.

"You are anxious—very anxious—to have a chat with me," said the thin man, settling himself luxuriously in his chair. "Pray go on—my friend here does not matter at all—you can speak quite freely in his presence."

The visitor hesitated; then proceeded:—

"I have brought to Monsieur his winnings which he forgot to take last night at the table. This cheque—"

"Ah, many thanks," said the thin man; "but I'm not in need of it just at present. If you would like to put it aside for me—or, better still, if you would like to devote it to the good of the poor hereabouts—eh?"

The Casino official looked bewildered, and fidgeted, and stroked his beard. There was a silence—awkward on the part of the official; employed in suppressed chuckles by the thin man.

"Monsieur proposes to make a stay in Monte Carlo?" asked the official, very uneasily.

"Well—I really haven't decided," said the thin man, cheerfully.

"Ah!—then—Monsieur proposes to make to us the honour of often visiting the tables?"

"Why, I haven't made any plans about that, either."

The official stroked his beard in a desolated way: the expression of anxiety on his brow was obvious and painful. He glanced from the thin man to me.

"Monsieur might—ah!—might perhaps be disposed to acquiesce in some little arrangement touching his departure?" he said at length, somewhat hoarsely. "The administration are always liberal, and—"

"Oh, I'm not in want of money," said the thin man,

cheerfully. "You might glean that from my leaving my winnings last night."

"That is true, my faith!" said the official. "But—the truth is—Monsieur appears to enjoy extraordinary good fortune—wonderful chance!"

"Luck, you mean, of course. It is not luck, however, my dear sir: it is simply a knowledge of the future—that is all. Will you kindly keep your eye on the corner of that house on the sea-front there, while I tell you about the persons who will pass from behind it on the pavement? A fat man in a brown coat—there he is, you see; three ladies and a little dog—there they are; a policeman and a gendarme carrying a white parcel; next, a white dog; now a woman with a large basket."



"A gendarme carrying a white parcel."

There was no possibility of the thin man having seen the pedestrians before they appeared from behind the house. The Casino official turned pale and scratched his nose.

“ You perceive—there’s no ‘luck’ about it,” continued the thin man; “ I wish there were, confound it! Well, it may have occurred to you that it is in my power to foretell every coup in the play-rooms?”—he kept his twinkling eye fixed on the official, whose jaw had dropped in despair; and chuckled inwardly all the time he spoke—“ to communicate the knowledge to others—to everyone in the rooms, in fact. I might break every bank, every day, until the place simply had to be shut up; think of that, my dear sir—*shut up!* I could simply sweep away the whole place; just turn that over in your mind! But perhaps you *have?* ”

There was little doubt that the official *had*: he was ghastly pale, and his eyes were staring like a madman’s; while the thin man, grinning cheerfully, sat up in his chair and looked straight into the other’s eyes.

“ But—surely—Monsieur—*mon Dieu*—Monsieur has not the hardness of heart to propose to himself so terrible a plan? We have not offended Monsieur in any way? We are at Monsieur’s commands. Anything we can do to make him pleasure—all our possible—is at his disposition! Monsieur would like to accept a share in the undertaking—a very large share? Even a quarter—a half? Monsieur will do the honour of joining the administration?”

The thin man laughed softly.

“ Oh, dear, no!” he said, pleasantly; “ I have no ambition in that direction. Really, I haven’t decided on any plan. I may amuse myself at the tables”—(the official winced, and his teeth chattered)—“ or, on the other hand, I may never enter again. Goodness knows.”

“ But—at least—Monsieur will give me his promise to abstain from communicating his terrible knowledge to

persons—to the crowd? He will be so gentle as to promise—”

“Oh—I really can’t make any promises, you know. Why should I?”

“But—reflect—you do not hate us, Monsieur?”



“The official rose.”

“Oh, dear, no,” said the thin man, agreeably. “Not a bit of it. You have amused me with splendid concerts, and all that, all for nothing. I am inclined to like the administration. Whatever I do will simply be to amuse myself—of course, it *may* be bad for you—I don’t say it *will*, you know.”

The official rose, pale and bewildered. He passed his hand across his forehead, damp with drops. He went towards the door—hesitated and turned back—then bowed and went slowly out.

“Now, you know, this affair will tease those fellows. They’ll be in an awful state of mind, eh?

That’s what I want—I shall leave

them in perplexity—see? Hang over them like a sword—they’ll always be on the tremble for fear I’m going to turn up, or set up an establishment to give people tips about the winning numbers!” He chuckled consumedly; then he added,—

“As a matter of fact, I’m off to-night; but I shall tell the landlord that I may return very shortly; *they’ll*

find that out over there; and they will have a time of it!"

I could eat no dinner that day; I could not keep my pipe alight that evening; I could not listen to the concert at the Casino; the thin man's words to me, "I'll spare you that, and you have reason to be very thankful to me!" buzzed in my head until I felt giddy. Three or four times I went to his door to seek him and beg him to tell me at once *what* was to happen to me; but I could not screw up my courage to hear it. I loathed him; but that did no good. He was going away that night—could I let him go carrying that secret with him, and perhaps never see him again? Then I said to myself: "Don't be a fool! Treat it all as a stupid imposture, or a dream!" and I actually undressed and got into bed; and immediately got out again and dressed. He was going westward by the midnight train; I went down and got my bill, and told them to put my luggage on the omnibus for that train.

He chuckled again when I got into the omnibus with him, and said: "You've decided to depart very suddenly, haven't you? No bad news of any kind, I hope?"

Twenty times in the train I opened my mouth to ask him *what* it was that was to happen to me just about three years hence; and at last the question did burst out wildly.

"Oh—that?" he said; "you haven't forgotten those chance words of mine? Oh, dear; let's forget them; we won't bother ourselves about that. You'll find out in good time, *I* can tell you!" He grinned and nodded his head several times. "Now, shall I tell you what I'm going to do? It will amuse you. There's an American millionaire

in Paris who has just been operating tremendously—plunging heels over head in a certain speculation.

“I happened to get this information in a letter from a friend of mine in Paris; I don't know what's happening synchronously around me except in the ordinary way of knowing it; it's only the future that this confounded ailment of mine causes me to see—hang the thing! Well, I foresee that that speculation will come to the most disastrous smash unless the American fellow takes a certain course; and I'm going to tell him that, but keep him in the dark as to the course he ought to choose—see? It will turn his hair grey, eh?”

“You really seem very vindictive!” I exclaimed, in spite of myself.

His whole expression changed suddenly—he seemed to become suddenly haggard, the victim of an overpowering horror, as he replied,—

“It is about two months now since the foreknowledge of the hideous thing which is to happen to me seven years hence first darted into my brain. The thing in store for me at that time is about as awful as anything I have ever imagined—and *it will happen!* I've brooded on it now for these two months, until I wonder I am not mad. I was a stoutish man before this horrible ailment of mine—look at me now!

“Well, this foreknowledge has embittered me—soured me. I lie awake all night brooding on that thing which is to come, until I scream sometimes.

“It has made me ill-natured—my only diversion is to give other people a touch of what I feel myself. I try to keep my mind off my own misery by that amusement. There's

your case, for instance—there's the thing which is to happen to *you* on the 19th of March three years hence—the 19th of March ; don't forget ! It is not quite so horrible as *my* fate—but in all conscience it is enough to make one shudder,



“Twenty times I opened my mouth to ask him what it was.”

my dear sir ! You can't avert it : it's sure to come—but, there ; it's one of those things which it is best not to dwell upon ; so let's forget it, and talk about other things. Look at that station-master there—there's a nice thing to happen to him in three weeks' time ; egad, I should like to get down and tell him about it, only I can't speak French well enough.

Dear, dear ; now I regret that I can't ; what a drawback it is to be unable to speak a language ! ”

I let him rattle on, and ceased to hear what he said. Should I refuse to hear what my fate was to be—get out at the next station and hurry off ? Or should I beg him to tell me, for mercy's sake ? Or should I *make* him reveal it—threaten to kill him unless— ? Pooh ! He *knew* I could not kill him : he *knew* he had to live seven years at least—until that calamity came upon him.

So I determined to keep touch with him ; travel with him to Paris, and never lose sight of him : and I went to the same hotel with him at Marseilles. I overheard him tell the porter of his intention to leave by the train on the following night : but next day I found he had gone by the morning train. I took the next train to Paris, and used every plan I could think of to find him—for three weeks I was on his track : but I had lost him.

So there was that 19th of March three years hence hanging over me ! I struggled hard to thrust the thing from my mind, taking up all kinds of occupations to drive it away ; but the thought would come upon me at intervals with such force that I could get no sleep for weeks together. My hair began to turn prematurely grey, and my face became wan and furrowed.

I was told by friends that I was a ghastly sight ; and my unconquerable gloom drove them from my society.

And one day I was travelling on the District Railway, face to face with the only other occupant of the compartment. He was a plump, contented-looking man ; and there was something in his manner which I seemed to recognize. Suddenly he began to stare at me ; then an expression of

great mental distress passed over his face ; and he said :
 “ Were you ever at Monte Carlo ? ”

A conviction was growing in my mind as I replied, “ Yes—
 —unfortunately for me ! ”

He placed his hand on mine, nervously, as if in great
 pity.

“ In March—two years ago ? ” he asked.

“ Yes—curse the time ! ”

“ Do you know me ? ” he
 said, in a trembling voice.

“ Yes ! ” I almost screamed,
 starting up. “ You are the
 fiend who— *Will* you tell
 me *now* what is to happen to
 me—a year hence—the 19th
 of next March ? ”

He was silent ; he passed
 his hand over his brow as if in
 a strained effort to remember ;
 and he looked at me in a way
 so helpless, so remorseful, so
 beseeching, that I felt my
 expression of deadly hate
 relax and my clenched fists
 open. Again he laid his hand
 on mine, and said, in a faltering voice,—

“ I can recollect nothing—*nothing*—of the things I fore-
 saw during my ailment. When I returned to London I
 recovered from my abnormal condition of mind, and all the
 future faded from me. I can remember that I foretold
 something which was to happen to you at some date or other,



“ I was travelling on the
 District Railway.”

but that is all." He looked at me and shuddered; there was no need for him to *tell* me how changed I was.

"Try!" I said, hoarsely. Again he tried—it was useless.

Then, suddenly, it came over me that *now* had arrived my opportunity for revenge; he had evidently forgotten that a horrible fate was to overtake *him* five years from then. I chuckled inwardly in a demoniac way, and thought over the words in which to remind him of the coming catastrophe—but he was still looking at me with that crushed look of remorse and pity; and I could not say the thing. He covered his face with his hands, and tears trickled from between his fingers. I was silent. "Why don't you kill me?" he said.

"Perhaps," he said, suddenly brightening—"perhaps that foreknowledge of mine was all nonsense—merely a mental hallucination. It must have been—the thing is impossible!"

"Do you recollect the numbers on the roulette table?" I said, "and the people passing along the sea-front? and the German's telegram?"

"I will try my hardest, day and night, to recollect!" he said. "Here is my address ——. Come and stay with me, so that if, at any moment, the recollection comes upon me, you may be at hand to hear. What a demon I must have been at that time—*why?* I wonder. What can have changed me so, then? It is not my nature!"

Here was the opportunity to enlighten him—and I was silent.

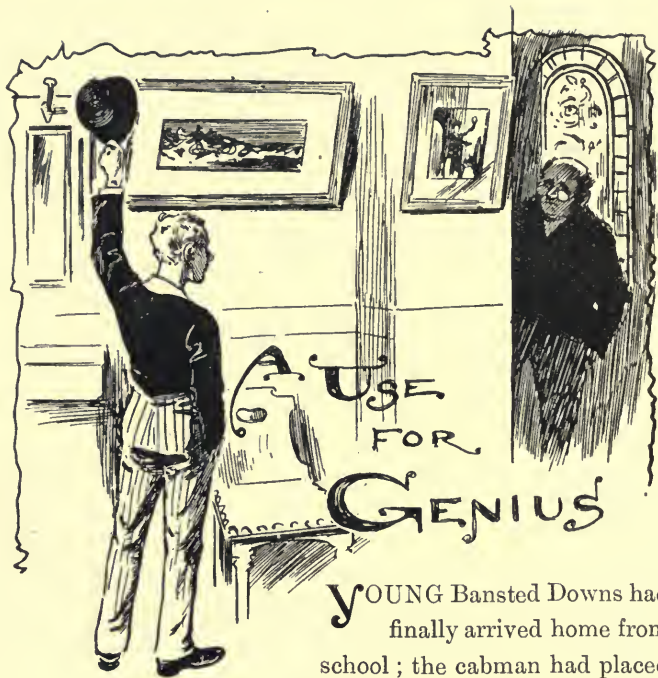
* * * * *

He has tried for a year, now, to recollect—tried incessantly. He has grown careworn again—nearly as much so as when I first knew him.

For the last three months I have been always at his side, watching his face for the first gleam of memory ; but it has never come. Again and again, in my moments of horror, I have almost told him of the fate hanging over *him*, and due in a little over four years –but I have not done it. I feel half mad at times. I am very ill, and have become an old man at thirty-four. He is sitting by me, holding my hand, and reading to me.

Now and again a shudder passes over him, and he ceases to read, and passes his hand across his knitted brow. The sun is setting in a bank of black clouds. It is March 18th !





YOUNG Bansted Downs had finally arrived home from school ; the cabman had placed his box in the front hall and young D. was in the act of hanging up his hat on the stand, when the elder Bansted Downs, his father, put his head out of the library and said,—

“ And now, young Bansted Downs, what sphere in life do you propose to fill ? ”

“ I have been thinking, old Banstead Downs,” replied the youth respectfully, “ since I left school seventy-five minutes ago, that I should prefer to be something prosperous.”

The father nodded his head approvingly at this evidence of foresight in his child, and said,—

“I think you have come to a very wise decision, young Bansted Downs. No doubt you have, while at school, selected such studies as were best fitted to prepare you for the struggle of life?”

“I think so, old Bansted Downs,” replied the son. “The head-master took in regularly for our use all the best prize-competition periodicals; in fact, he was of opinion that a complete selection of these rendered all other educational books superfluous. I myself have attained to such dexterity in guessing the right word, deciding on the best eight pictures and the two best stories, divining the correct number of pairs of boots made in London on a given day, and so forth, that Dr. Practiccle pronounced my education singularly complete.”

“Good—very good! young Bansted Downs,” said the father, thoughtfully; “and now as to a more specific choice of profession?”

“Well, old Bansted Downs,” said the son, “I have been thinking that I should like to be apprenticed to a Genius, with a view to adopting his calling.”

“Very well thought out,” said the parent. “I must consider whether the necessary premium—”

“Pray do not trouble about that,” said the son, “as my success at the word-competitions has more than provided for the contingency.” And young Bansted Downs drew from his pocket a large bag filled with a mixture of sovereigns, marbles, and peppermint-drops.

“Very good! Then the matter’s settled; and perhaps you would like something to eat.”

All the friends by whose opinion old Bansted Downs set any store heartily approved of young Bansted Downs’ choice

of a calling; and the matter was fully discussed that evening. The advertisement columns of the newspapers were consulted as to the most suitable genius to undertake the charge of the youth; and the following seemed promising:—

“To Parents and Guardians.—Young men of promise wishing to adopt the profession of genius will do well to apply to Brayne Power and Sons, of 3019A George Street Hanover Square, who have a vacancy for one apprentice. Telephone No. 7142863.”

The very next day young Bansted Downs called at the address given; and was shown into the presence of Power senior, a man of venerable appearance, whose high broad forehead, far-away gaze, long hair, and abstraction sufficiently revealed his calling.

“It will be fifty pounds—twenty-five down, and the rest in monthly instalments of one pound after you have got your H.A.W.,” said the Master Genius.

“If you please, what is my H.A.W.?” asked young Bansted Downs.

“Your final degree—your Head Above Water.”

“That will not be just yet?” asked the youth.

“Oh, dear, no! Not for a very long while, if ever. There are two preliminary degrees to get before that. There are the F.I. and the E.P.—your Foot In and your Ear of the Public; and before you can obtain either of these you will have to Make your Mark.”

“I can sign my name—will not that do as well?” asked the youth.

“That entirely depends upon the sort of name. If it's just a surname with a coronet over it, it entitles you to your

F.I. and your E.P. without any examination. You have the same advantage if you can append to your signature either of the following affixes: P.P. (Pertinacious Pusher) or C.I. (Chum of the Influential).

“But if you can’t sign these kinds of names, you will have



“The Master Genius.”

to Make your Mark. It’s a difficult mark, and requires a lot of learning.

“As the first instalment of twenty-five pounds down is all I am ever likely to get, I will take it now—no, that one won’t do; it’s a peppermint-drop, not a sovereign. *That’s* not the way to get on, young man!”

“Isn’t it?” asked young Bansted Downs thoughtfully.

“I’m glad you told me. I thought perhaps it might be ; but, of course, I’ve got to learn.”

That very week young Bansted Downs commenced his studies under the Master Genius. He found he had a very great deal to learn.



“A house-painter is a specimen of genius.”

“The difference between talent and genius is that talent does what it can and genius does what it must—you will find that in the poets,” said the Master Genius. “Consequently, to be a genius, you need not feel that you have the *ability* to do a thing, but only that it is *necessary* to do it. A house-painter is a specimen of genius: he has not the ability to do his work; but he is compelled to do it in order to obtain the means for his Saturday drinks. But, of course, that’s only one kind of genius. What we have to teach you first is to feel that you *must* do something transcendent—and then all you’ve got to do is to do it—see?”

So, acting on his instructions, young Bansted Downs went to the office and sat quite still day after day for a month or two, with his eyes fixed on space; and one afternoon at the end of that time he got up and

rushed at Power junior (who took charge of him in these preliminary studies), and announced that he felt the irresistible impulse to do something great and wonderful.

“What sort of thing?” asked the Junior Genius.

“I don’t know—anything—something stupendous and transcendent—a master-piece!” said young Bansted Downs.

“Knock it off, then. Don’t make a labour of it, mind; that would spoil all the genius of it. Just knock it off—shed it—see?”

The apprentice went back to his stool in the corner and knocked off that scintillation of genius.

“Very good for a beginner,” said the Junior Genius; “you show much promise. I shall soon be able to hand you over to my father for the Higher Grades.”

And some time after that young Bansted Downs moved into the room of the Master Genius to learn the higher attributes of genius—eccentricity and obscureness. These were the most important parts of the qualifications, and he worked hard at acquiring them. The eccentricity had infinite ramifications extending into language, manner, dress, habits, appearance, and opinions. The teacher communicated a thousand little touches of eccentricity invaluable to a genius—such as the bringing out of a book of poems with the title printed upside down and the capitals at the end of the lines instead of the beginning; the wearing of the back hair tied in a bow under the tip of the nose, and so forth. The pupil learned to hop backwards on to a public platform, wearing his dress-coat upside down, to paint his figures with their bones outside their skin, to sob audibly when performing on the piano; and many other things necessary to the obtaining of his degrees.

Having completed these studies, he was ready for the uphill work of trying to Make his Mark; and he found it a complicated bit of drawing too, far worse than the signature of a Chinese emperor—everything lay in the flourish.

The Master Genius said that no one could Make his Mark without a great flourish; and the best way to make the



“To sob audibly when performing on the piano.”

flourish was to blow it on his own trumpet; so there was the expense of a trumpet.

But he didn't seem able to get on; and after he had worn out a gross of pens in the attempt to Make his Mark he felt that he would never obtain his degrees; and took a back cistern-cupboard under the roof in a poor street, and fell into a low state.

One day, as he was eating his weekly sausage at the

Three Melancholy Geniuses, off Fleet Street, there entered a party whom he knew slightly and who had Made his Mark and passed all his degrees some time before.

“Haven’t Made your Mark yet?” said this party. “Tell you what—why don’t you get Boomed?”



“I called at the office every day and shouted my name.”

“Does it hurt?” asked young Bansted Downs.

“Hurts your self-respect just a little and your respect for your fellow-creatures a little more—but it’s nothing,” replied the party.

“Where do you go?”

“To the Booming Department, of course. Just put your name down for Booming, and fill up a form, stating

what you require said about you. You began all wrong : I never studied—I only went and put my name down the moment it occurred to me that I would be a genius. I called at the office every day, and shouted my name, and created disturbances, and got turned out ; until at last they couldn't stand it any longer, and my turn came.

“ They put a long article about me in every newspaper, all the same day—mostly interviews—and quoted me as a classic. Some of 'em described me as a painter, and others as a novelist : I never was either ; but it answered all right.”

So young Bansted Downs went to the Booming office, and put down his name, and shouted ; and the end of it was he got his Boom, and several editors wrote to him ; and he began to be a little successful.

He hired halls and went before the public in person ; and painted on the platform ; and sang and played his own compositions to them ; and recited his own poems, and acted his own plays ; and told them about his own scientific researches, and his military, exploratory, judicial, political, and athletic achievements.

But the thing dulled off, for one day a deputation of the public called at the Booming office to ask something about him ; and the office had forgotten his name, and said that he wasn't being Boomed now, as Smith was up ; and so the public got on an omnibus and went to Smith's hall ; and Bansted Downs faded out.

After that he was to be found all day at the Three Melancholy Geniuses, drooping over fours of Irish ; and one day his late instructor happened to come in and find him thus, with his melancholy nose over the edge of his glass.

“ Haven’t got your Head Above Water, I see ? ” said the Master Genius. “ Sorry you haven’t Made your Mark.”

“ I’ve made a good many,” said Downs, pointing to the wet rings on the counter.

“ Ah, that sort of mark’s no use—unless you make it in company,” said the Genius.

One day as young Bansted Downs sat in his cistern-cupboard biting his nails, a step was heard on the stair ; and his late instructor entered.

“ I’ve been all wrong,” he said, sitting down on the cistern. “ I put you all wrong—I’ve put all my pupils all wrong. I fell down stairs lately and knocked my head, and when I got up I saw everything—the light broke in upon me ! ”

“ Why, you’ve cut your hair, and you’re dressed quite neatly—I should hardly have known you for a Master Genius at all ! ” exclaimed young Bansted Downs.

“ I am no longer a Genius—I am now the M.W.K.A.A.I.—the Man Who Knows All About It. I now know why genius fails to get the Ear of the Public, and is not appreciated—”

“ Fault of the public—everybody knew that before,” growled young Bansted Downs.

“ Pardon me, it is not the fault of the poor public, but the fault of the system. We—the entertainers—have made the mistake of being geniuses ; whereas we had no business to meddle with genius at all.

“ It is the public who ought to have the genius ; *they* should have the lively appreciation, the keen sense of humour, the afflatus, and all that ; and then those who cater for them would not need to trouble about those things

—they would only have to cater, and leave the public to perceive, by means of their genius, the excellences of the fare provided. If a plain person does something, and geniuses perceive greatness in it, that's a right state of affairs; but if a genius does something great, and plain persons fail to appreciate it, that's a wrong state of things and a waste of material—see?"

"And what do you propose to do?" asked young Bansted Downs.

"That's very simple—just make geniuses of the public. Of course the public, having their own affairs to attend to, will not wish to turn caterers and originate—their province is to appreciate, perceive, applaud, and pay at the doors—see? By this system any dullard is enabled, without effort, fatigue, or preliminary study, to Make his Mark and get his F.I., his E.P., and his H.A.W. A child could use it."

"But," objected young Bansted Downs, "under your system, dullardism paying so well, everybody would want to cater for the public, and there wouldn't be any audience—any public."

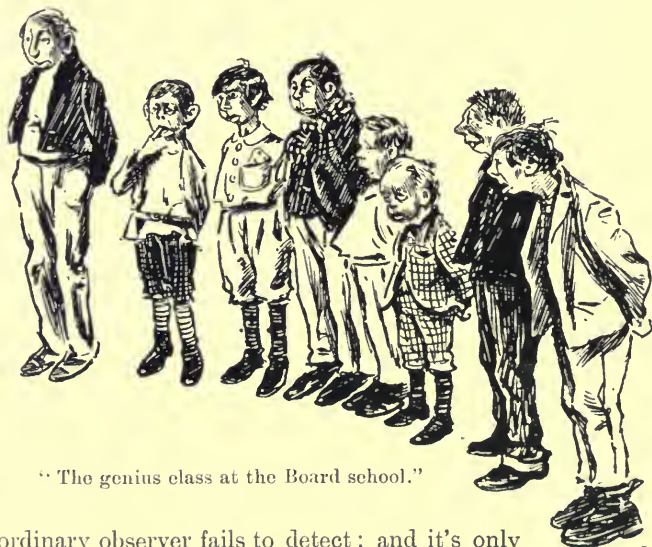
"Pooh! The system at present in vogue is all I require—compulsory education. Everybody will have to be educated as a genius, except a few who will be specially exempted from attendance at the Board schools to enable them to lie fallow and fit themselves for originators.

"Of course, you may say that it would not be *necessary* for the entertainer to be dull. Of course it would not; but, as it is not necessary for him to be a genius either, there would be a waste of public money in educating him as one. In fact, it might be a disadvantage for both originator and appreciator to be geniuses, and their conceptions might

clash and create confusion. It's better for a conception to be lighted from one side only, as you get more contrast."

"But would not the genius of the spectator simply perceive the dulness of the originator?"

"Not in the least. It's just the sphere of genius to perceive, in a given production, excellences which the



"The genius class at the Board school."

ordinary observer fails to detect; and it's only a question of degree of genius. I take it that perfect genius can detect perfect excellence in everything submitted to its discrimination. And now, will you be kind enough to come and vote for me, as for the furtherance of my scheme I am offering myself as Chairman of the School Board?"

In due course, the Man Who Knew All About It was elected to the School Board. He secured this by publishing handbills declaring his intention to squander the ratepayers'

money like water and provide free food, clothing, lodging, sweets, tobacco, drinks, theatres, and pianos to all the Board school children and their parents, relatives, and friends. The public judged by the proceedings of past candidates, all of whom had deliberately broken their promises on coming into office; and they concluded that this one would do so as well, and refuse to spend a penny. The Board were compelled to choose him as Chairman; and he at once commenced his work of reform.

Genius took the place of all the former studies at the Board schools; no pupil was permitted to leave until he had passed the fifth standard, which turned him out a full-fledged genius; and he had to attend until he *could* pass it, even if he became old and decrepit. This was a wise step; for, had this rule been relaxed, those unable to pass the standard would have joined the ranks of the originators, and thus flooded the market.

Young Bansted Downs now set himself to steadily forgetting all the genius he had learned, feeling that it would be nothing but an encumbrance in his new career; and he succeeded so well that in the course of a few years he had become as dull as ditch-water.

Meanwhile a new public were growing up, a public of such brilliant perceptions—so great a faculty of appreciation—that they were quite bewildered with the excellences they perceived in everything around them.

To take the sense of humour alone: they possessed it to so marvellous an extent that they could perceive a joke in the passing cloud, facetiousness in the growth of flowers, a choice witticism in the rates and taxes, an incentive to mirth

in strikes. Not that they were incessantly giggling—that would have argued a something wanting; no, they drank in and appreciated and enjoyed the universal humour, and their eyes were bright.

So, when young Bansted Downs was middle-aged Bansted Downs he started all over again in quite a different way:



“A choice witticism in the rates and taxes.”

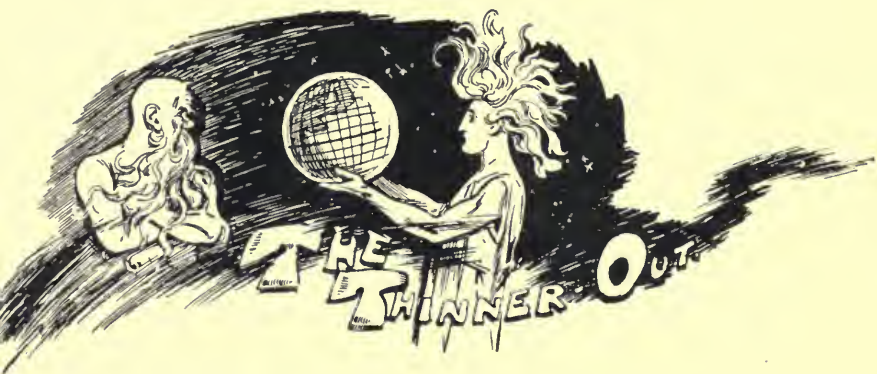
he just wrote twaddle, and painted twaddle, and composed twaddle: and went on to a platform and twaddled about twaddle: and the public genius detected the brilliancy lurking in it all; and they were in ecstasies.

A terrible thing happened to the Boom Department. One day the public arose as one man and remarked that they were capable of finding out merit for themselves and no longer required the Department; and they took

large stones, and bad eggs, and dead cats, and fagots of wood, and proceeded to the Boom Department; and it was in vain that the head of the Department came out on the balcony and pleaded that the Booming System had nothing to do with the finding-out of merit; for the public smashed the windows and burned the offices, and abolished the Boom Department.

However, nobody required Booming now, as absence of ability was no longer a bar to fame; and things worked far more happily than they ever had under the old system. Authors and others no longer pined under want of appreciation; on the contrary, they were always wildly surprised at the wonderful things the public discovered in their work; and as for the public, they were vastly contented.

It's the true system—there's not a question about that.



“IS IT, OR IS IT NOT, POSSIBLE FOR THIS UNIVERSE TO
HAVE EVER EXISTED?”

YOU will recollect that the more thoughtful, more logical, less visionary spirit William conclusively proved the impossibility of our existence.

Yet he was wrong. Very slight inquiries into evidence have since convinced me that our Universe *does* exist. It is difficult to credit, in the face of William's logic: but I fear we *must* believe it.

Very well—waiving the possibility of our *all* being hypnotized through all the ages (say by Adam, Rameses the Great, Mr. Stead, or some other power having sway over human minds) into a belief of the existence of the non-existent—we will, please, take it as carried that we *do* exist, and that even William is forced to admit it. Very good: now let's get on.

“What do you think *now*?” asked James, a weak-minded scintillation of triumph in his eye.

William was evidently seriously offended; facts which contradict carefully-weighed logic, flawless in all other respects, are always irritating to the thoughtful. Men of science will endorse this.

' "Hurrm!" he said at last; "your Universe does exist—in a way; and the globe you call 'Terra' does exist—in a way. But the highly objectionable creatures on it don't seem too comfortable; in fact, a more ridiculous, calamitous, disastrous, pitiful, gruesome, repulsive muddle than they make of it I could not possibly conceive!"

"But they have *some* reasonable qualities?" argued James.

"A few," said William. "Those taught them by the conduct of what you call the lower animals. I know what's principally wrong with them—they *think*, and *do things* too much."

"Well, they are, perhaps, too much given to thinking and doing things. I admit that they make many mistakes, but I *do* protest that they *mean well*—that their theories are, as a whole, in the right direction—that they have a solid, genuine admiration for good aims and great deeds, and reward such merits when conspicuously shown by any among them."

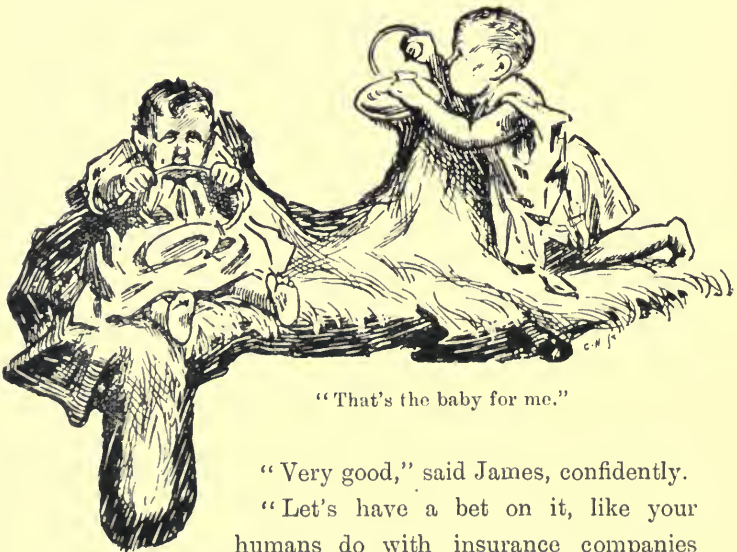
"Hum!" said William.

"Oh, come," said James; "you *must* admit that humanity's rewards are, as a rule, conferred on those who do the greatest service to humanity."

"From *my* point of view, yes!" said William. "Let's have a game!" he said, suddenly.

"A game?" said James, taken aback by such a proposition from the cynical and severe William.

“Yes,” said the latter. “Let us put this point of yours to the test. Let you and me select each a specimen of humanity from among this herd, each of us choosing the specimen which he deems most likely to obtain the highest praises and rewards of humanity; let us choose our specimens as babies, and watch them through their subsequent careers—eh?”



“That’s the baby for me.”

“Very good,” said James, confidently.

“Let’s have a bet on it, like your humans do with insurance companies about the length of their lives,” said William. “I will bet you—let’s see—I’ll bet you that comet against that little star over there in the constellation like a saucepan. The comet’s more showy, and apparently better value; so that will please *you* best: and you won’t notice its flimsiness as compared with the greater solidity of the little star.”

“But what nonsense!” said James. “What in space

would be the use of a comet or a star to one of us? What could we do with it?

"You could give yours," said William, in that nasty tone of his, "to one of your humans. He would be delighted. It's exactly the kind of thing they are always longing for."

Then they looked about among humanity.

"I've chosen my baby," said James. "Something has gone wrong with another baby's feeding-bottle, and my baby is trying to put it right."

"Very curious!" said William. "The baby I had chosen is the very baby whose feeding-bottle—(anachronism is nothing to *us*, James—we deal with *all dates*)—your baby is attempting to put right. While your baby is so engaged, *my* baby is damaging the tube of *your* baby's bottle, to the end that your baby may fail to get any nourishment through it. That's the baby for *me*!"

James laughed in derision. "Well, if you think *your* choice will merit the praises of humanity——!" he began.

"Stop!" said William. "The words in our agreement were '*obtain* the praises of humanity.' We said nothing about *meriting* them. I say my choice will obtain them."

"Well, well," said James, "you needn't split hairs!"

"I'm not splitting hairs," replied William; "I am pointing out the chasm between two mountains."

"But—confound it!" said James, impatient at his companion's want of reason. "You don't mean to seriously tell me that you seriously believe that humanity would seriously choose to reward those who injure rather than those who benefit——"

"Never mind what I believe. You'll see," said William.



“ Found a dead bird.”

“See, our babies are growing; they are little boys now. What’s yours doing?”

“Mine,” said James, triumphantly, “has found a dead bird, and is trying to bring it to life.”

“That is the bird which *my* little boy has killed,” said William.

James sniggered again. “You had better make another choice,” he said.

“*Will* you kindly mind your own business,” said William, “and look after your chance of that comet? You’d better be ordering a handsome casket to present it to your baby in *when* he has obtained the praises of humanity. What’s your baby up to now?”

“He has grown,” replied James, gazing earthwards. “He is at school. Another boy has been knocked down in the playground by a third boy——”

“Yes—by *my* boy,” put in William.

“And my boy is attending to his bruises and trying to ease the pain of them.”

“Just so,” said William. “A most mistaken young person! I knew he would—just the sort of thing he *would* be up to!”

“At any rate, he is earning the gratitude of the victim,” protested James.

“The gratitude of victims,” said the objectionable William, “is not legal tender; it is not even a marketable article. Did you ever see the gratitude of victims quoted in the share-lists of the newspapers published by your precious humans? Have you ever seen it advertised for in the columns of that periodical of theirs called *Exchange and Mart*? You may have seen it advertised for sale there; but there were

no answers. Now look at *my* boy, James—look at him! That's promise, if you like! He's knocking down *all* the other boys like ninepins."

"Your boy is a Bully," said James.

"Ah! you've discovered it then? It has at last dawned upon you that I am bound to win. My boy is a Bully. You may as well just hand over that little star out of the saucepan at once, and save further trouble."

"What! *Do* you mean to tell me," screamed James, rising on the tips of his toes with indignation, "to tell me that a Bully is the sort of person to obtain the highest praises and rewards of his fellow-creatures?"

"I do," said William. "The sort, and the *only* sort. I'll grant that your beneficent person who does a lot of good to your humans may come in for a good large amount of praises, and also even get a small amount of solid rewards: but the fellow they really love is your Bully."

"How can they love him? Impossible!" said James.

"Then why do the confounded creatures act as though they did? You can only judge of their sanity by their acts, and those disprove it. Let's go on. What's my boy doing now?"

"He is playing with a lot of little toy soldiers," said James. "He is knocking them over with toy cannon. Now he is constructing little toy towns, and setting fire to them."

"And your boy?"

"Is picking up the little soldiers, and trying to bend them straight and set them on their legs again."

"Ah! Always throwing away your chances of winning that comet by wasting his time earning the gratitude of

victims!" said the horrid William. "And now they have both left school, and are studying. My boy is practising sword-cuts, and reading about words of command, and linked battalions and machine-guns."

"And my boy is practising tying bandages, and reading about arteries, and nerves, and compound fractures, and epidemics. My boy is fitting himself as a Healer."

"And my boy," said William, "is fitting himself for a Slayer."

"You are either mad," said James, "or are indulging in a pastime which is not your *forte*—a jest. You cannot seriously imagine that these humans will actually prefer one who slays them!"

"I *know* they will—it just tallies with their queer ways. They profess to hold human life at the highest value! That's not humbug on their parts, mind you—they are under the delusion that they do so hold it. Life is to them an object of joy, and the absence of it one of regret; as I told you once before, they delight in the filling up of the waste places of their ball with human life. They don't consider animal life as life.

"If an island is full of intelligent elephants who hardly ever make mistakes, and quiet domesticated kangaroos, and contented rabbits, these humans of yours say, 'What a pity it isn't inhabited—we ought to people that desert!' They don't recognize the fact that it *is* inhabited and *isn't* a desert! They are delighted at the growing crowds in their towns; and if they look down a lane and don't see anyone in it, they drop a tear and think, 'It's very sad there should be no human life in that lane.'

"And here comes in one of the queerest phases in the



Slayer and Healer.

exceeding queerness of these people of yours—all the while they are under the impression that they consider the increase of humanity as of the highest advantage, they have an unrecognized instinct which tells them that things will be mightily uncomfortable for them when their ball gets a little overfilled: and from this unrecognized instinct springs their partiality to anyone who thins them out. The Thinner-Out is the object of their very highest rewards——

“Ha! Look—look there, on that TERRA of yours. There’s a great ship about to be wrecked—yes, there it goes, crashing on the rocks. There will be a wholesale bit of thinning-out there—no; see, one of your humans, by the exercise of superhuman energy, and at infinite risk to himself, is saving the whole lot of them. Every one of them is safe on land now. They are crowding round their preserver——”

“Ha!” cried James. “Where are your precious cynical arguments *now*? Look at their gratitude—look how they grasp his hand, and kiss it, and——”

“Collect for him a sum amounting to nearly fifty pounds, and send him a medal, and mention him in the principal newspapers—nearly half a column in some!—and drop him,” said William.

“Of course,” he continued, “there are several kinds of Thinners-Out—there’s the one who spreads epidemics by travelling in public conveyances when suffering from communicable ailments; they don’t reward him, because no particular effort is required for his kind of work—a child could do it: but he is protected by the laws. Who ever heard of anyone being visited by any heavier punishment than the fine of a few coins for wilfully thinning-out humans

in this way? Nobody. Then there are two kinds of the class who go in for the most lucrative method of thinning-out—War. There's the warrior who thins out his fellow-creatures to gratify his own personal inclinations and ambitions; and there's the warrior who is forced to thin them out by the duty of defending his country against the former kind of warrior."

"Ah! and the second's the kind of warrior his fellow-humans will heap the highest rewards upon," said James.

"Oh, *is* he?" said William. "All right; for the sake of curiosity let us just follow the career of a third boy—the little one that was knocked down by *my* boy, and tended by yours. What is *he* at now?"

"Why, he is practising with a sword like your Bully; only he is practising parries instead of cuts; and he is also reading about words of command, and linked battalions, and machine-guns, and fortifications. And I recollect, by the way, that he was lately playing with a little toy town and trying to defend it."

"Just so," said William. "He'll do very well, mind you; but the other kind of warrior—my Bully—will distance him in rewards by leagues. Halloo!—there's a booming of cannon, and a noise of screaming. What's doing?"

"It's your Bully. He's an adult human now; and he's besieging a town; now he has taken it and set it on fire, and put the inhabitants to the sword."

"That's the way to begin, James! If you want to win the love and respect of those humans of yours, strike terror into them at the start. You see, those you spare feel so proud of their own cleverness in being spared, and so relieved about it, that they are in the best of humours; and,

looking about for somebody on whom to expend their good humour, they naturally fix on the figure that catches their eye first ; and that, of course, is the figure of the Thinner-Out. See ?”

“Your beastly baby is taking more towns, and kindly accepting ransoms for abstaining from destroying what never was his.”

“Yes ; and from a corner of the earth comes out the other boy who studied war ; and he stands in front of the one-half of the earth where he lives, to prevent the Bully attacking it ; and now there’s a great battle—another—another—and another, and my baby is beaten back from one-half of that globe of yours, and the other baby stands in the middle of that half and crows ; and my baby, the Bully, has to confine his attention to the half he has overrun and conquered ; while a wild, delirious, long-pent-up shout of heartfelt relief comes up from the humans on the defended half. Where’s that baby of yours—the doctor ?”

“There he is,” said James ; “there he is—picking up the damaged soldiers and trying to bend them straight and set them on their legs again ; checking epidemics and diseases arising from the privations and calamities of war, assuaging suffering, and curing and comforting thousands. You’ll lose your comet, William—come, confess it !”

“Bah !” said William. “You don’t know much of the ways of this pet fancy of yours, the inhabitants of that globule. See—they are about to show their gratitude to our three babies by conferring rewards—”

“They’re looking towards my baby, the Healer !” shouted James, excitedly.

Even William was interested out of his wonted calm by the situation.

“They’re handing him something done up in paper. What is it?” he shouted.

“A baronetcy—there!” shouted James. “And now they’re turning to the Thinner-Out who defended one-half of the world! See—what’s that they hand to him?”

“A dukedom!” shouted William. “Wait a bit—wait a bit—don’t crowd on to my toes—you can see where you are. Now—they’re turning towards—”

“Your Bully, the Champion Thinner-Out. They’re handing—don’t shove—”

“Well—what?” screamed William.

“An Imperial Crown!” gasped James.

Reader, if you do not believe in William’s theory, search your “Burke” for physicians qualified to sit in the House of Lords.



The Dwindling Hour

A STORY OF IMPRESSION AND CONVICTION ; BEING,
POSSIBLY, A TRUE WORD SPOKEN IN JEST.

I.



“IN an hour,” sang the minstrel to his harp whose frame was the curved black horn of a deer — “in an hour thy forefather strode from this spot whereon we sit to the summit of yon blue hill ; and there, as the sinking sun would bend to caress his feet (as grovels a vanquished foe), he would touch its face with his hand in token of friendliness. ’Twiht dawning of day and noon would thy great-forefather slay three hundred red-eyed wolves — one hundred shuffling bears !

“In a day did he carve and hew this bowl from the hardest rock, and fashion and form it thus ; and bore a hole in its base for the water to trickle and ooze, and number the hours that sped !”

Then up rose the hunter to whom he sang; and broad was his chest, and active his limb; and he cried aloud, "What my forefather did that will I do; in an hour will I stride from here to the summit of yon blue hill."

And those that sat around, listening, laughed from their deep chests, shouting in mockery; for the blue hill was a day's journey away.

Then in anger the chief clutched his spear of flint; and he cried to them, "Fill up the bowl to the mark that marks an hour, and fill it up again till the two hours' mark is reached; and ere the half is out will I stand on yon blue hill; and ere the last drop is sped I will moisten my hand in the bowl."

Then turned he his face to the West, and striding, stood on the cairn that capped the blue hill; and returning, plunged his hand in the bowl: and lo! his finger was moistened by the last drop ere it dripped from the hole at the base.

Then those that sat around sent up a shout of mockery; and they said, "Lo, since you strode away hath the red sun set on the hill, and hath risen again from the lake; and is stooping to set once more!"

"Then," cried he, "your words are a lie; for the clock but marks two hours."

But the others cried in their turn, "The marks in the bowl were made to number, not hours, but *days!*"

But the minstrel answered them, "Nay; they were made to number the hours—the hours of the distant past; the hours that were long as days."

Then the younger among them laughed, and held it a minstrel's myth; but the elders, pondering, cried, "These

words of the singer are sooth ; for the days that whiten our beards are passing in greater haste than the days that lengthened our limbs ! ”

But the younger among them said, “ The hole in the bowl is clogged ; it should run twelve times as fast. ”

And they bored the hole in the base till the water dripped more fast—twelve drops to the former one—and numbered the hours that passed.

And, wreathed in the grey of the mist that crept from the breast of the lake, the soul of the hero of old, of him who had fashioned the clock, looked down on them while they wrought : and vainly it strove to speak, and tell of the truth it knew ; but voice and a tongue to speak would it lack for ages to come, for never a voice or tongue would it have till its hour arrived to dwell in the flesh once more ; and then, and never till then, should it tell of the truth it knew.

II.

AND, behold, on a day certain men journeyed toward Egypt, and this was that land of Egypt that should thereafter be mighty exceedingly ; for these were the days before the First Dynasty—yea, many thousands of years before. And, it being nigh unto the time of the setting of the sun, they happened, by adventure, upon a cavern.

And they that journeyed toward the land of Egypt spake, saying, Shall we not lay down our burthens, and shall we not take the burthens from off our camels and from off our asses in this place, and abide for the day in this place, even here ?

And they laid down their burthens even as they had spoken, saying, Shall we not lay them down ? Also they

took the burthens from off their camels and from off the backs of their asses, yea, and even from off the backs of their wives; and did tether them, even their camels and their asses and their wives, round about the cavern; and the men that journeyed toward the land of Egypt entered



“They marvelled at the bowl.”

in unto the cavern, where there was shade, and washed their feet and rested in the heat of the day.

And it came to pass, while they that journeyed toward the land of Egypt rested in the cavern in the heat of the day, that they found a bowl in the cavern, and the bowl was of hard stone; even hewn from the hardest rock; and

in the base of the bowl was a hole ; and they that journeyed toward the land of Egypt marvelled at the bowl.

And behold a certain man of them that was a wise man spake, saying, This is a clock at which ye marvel ; for hath it not marks upon the inner side, even on the inward surface thereof ; and were these marks not made to show the hours, by the dripping of the water from the hole that is at the bottom of the bowl, even the under side thereof ?

But they cried out upon him, saying, This is no true thing that you speak, neither is it the fact : for the water would abide in the bowl, between one mark and another, for the space of more than an hour ; yea, even more than two or three hours !

Then they cried out all together that the bowl should be filled with water ; howbeit they said, Behold there is not in this cavern water sufficient to fill the bowl ; for have we not emptied the water skins that the women did fill at the well and did carry here ; and is not the well distant from this place, even many paces of a camel ?

And there was none among them that would arise and go in the heat of the day to fetch the water that was in the well ; but he that was wise among them spake, saying :—

Shall not our wives, even those that are tethered outside the cavern round about it—shall not these go unto the well and fill the bowl at the well, and bring it hither filled with the water that is in the well ?

So they that journeyed toward the land of Egypt called out to the wives that they should enter in and fetch the bowl and should fill it at the well, even as they had spoken.

And it came to pass even when the bowl was filled and set in their midst, that the water that was in the bowl, by

reason of its dripping so slowly from the hole that was at the bottom of the bowl, abode in the bowl between one mark and another the space of three hours by the shadow of a spear that was set up outside the cavern.

So they that journeyed toward the land of Egypt, even they that lay in the cavern, cried, saying, Behold, is it not even as we said, saying, The water will abide in the bowl between one mark and another for the space of more than an hour; and hath it not abode there the space of three hours?

But he that was wise among them said unto them, Nay, but for a certainty these marks that are in the bowl were made for the marking of the space of an hour; howbeit the hours that were at the time of the making of this bowl were they not of the space of three hours, even of three hours of the present time?

Then they that were aged and well stricken in years among them that lay in the cavern in the heat of the day, these communed with themselves for a space; and they spake, saying, Verily thus, and thus it seemeth unto us; that the space of the passing of the hours that behold the whiteness of our beards is verily shorter than the space of the passing of the hours that did behold the increasing of our statures in the tents of our fathers! And it seemed unto them even so, that this saying was true.

But they that were young among them, even the young men, scoffed, saying, The hole that is at the bottom of the bowl is clogged by reason of dirt that is within the hole: shall we not, therefore, bore out the hole, to the end that the water that is within the bowl shall drip faster, even three times as fast; and shall set forth the hours?

So they that were young did according to that saying;

stopped, showing the hours too long, was altered. One hour in the space of two did it count. Let Amun-Ta-Ra live.

IV.

Young Reuben scraped off his boots the worst of the mud from the furrows, shut the gate, and trudged homewards from his labour; as he turned into the road from the end of the lane he came in sight of old Reuben, sitting as usual on his heap of stones by the roadside; his hammer lay idly in his hand, its head on the heap of larger flints before him; the old gentleman was slowly shaking his head—not that he was such a very old gentleman; sixty, maybe; and still hale and strong.

“What be amiss, father?” said young Reuben. “Ye’ve bin a settin’ there shakin’ yer head like a old owl since I turned into the road. It be time to knock off.”

“Amiss, Reuben? Why, thet’s where you have me, like. What I know is, there be a somethin’ amiss; and it be either me or the time, and so I tell ye. Am I a-gettin’ old an’ weak, boy; or is it the hours a-goin quicker? Lookce here, Reuben; it do seem to me as I can do less in the time every blessed day as follers t’other! Why, thirty year ago, blest if I didn’t do—ah, double that there little ‘eap in the day’s work—and yet blame me if I feel a bit weaker nor I used ter! You mark my words, Reuben, boy; the hours is a-gettin’ shorter every day—thet’s what they’re a-doin’, and you put it down at thet!”

Young Reuben laughed incredulously. “You’re a-gittin’ lazy, old ‘un—that’s about the size of it,” he said.

“I hain’t a-gettin’ nothink o’ the kind nor discripshen!”

said old Reuben, starting up indignantly; "and you put it down at thet."

"Well, lazy or not lazy, I ken show ye a stone as you ain't industrious enough fer to break. Found it in a furrer, I did; an' talk about 'ard! And a fair rum 'un he be, too."

They plodded to the field young Reuben had just left; and young Reuben, with some difficulty, lifted the "stone" for inspection. It was a bowl, very ancient by the look of it, laboriously carved and ground out from a piece of rock that seemed as hard as steel.

"A rum 'un he be, too, and right you are," said old Reuben. "A wash-bowl, likely."

"What be that 'ole in the bottom fer, then?" said young Reuben.

"Why, fer to empty him, that be, as a pig might see with 'is eyes shet."

They carried the bowl home, and a pretty good weight they found it.

Old Jim Pedler came along that evening to have a pipe. Jim Pedler had been about a deal here and there, and he knew a lot.

"Why, whatee got theer?" said he.

"Mebbe ye'll know that better ner us," replied old Reuben. "Some kind o' wash-basin, so we seem to reckon it be."

"Wash-basin," said old Jim Pedler. "That's just what it been't. I tellee now, I do think as it's some kind of old sort of water-clock, an' that's what I think. Why, see here now, if there ain't bin lines 'ere inside fer to mark the hours or somethin'. That's it—it be a water-clock. S'pose we gits some water an' tries it."

They cleared out the hole at the bottom and filled the bowl with water up to the first hour mark ; and, old Jim Pedler having a watch, they sat and looked on as the water dripped out ; but when they had sat and smoked for two hours the bowl was still far from empty.

“ ’Twern’t never meant to reckon hours by, that’s a moral,” said young Reuben.



“ They sat and smoked for two hours.”

“ That’s more ner *you* knows,” replied old Reuben. “ What der *you* know about folks’s hours as lived ages ago ? You jest let other folks’s hours alone, as p’raps knowed better ner you. Mebbe their hours *was* longer—what did I say this verry day about the hours a-bein’ shorter now than wot they was thirty year ago ? But I tell yer wot : it ’ud make a notionable kind of clock if we was to bore the ’ole a bit bigger and jest manage to git it right for the hours.”

So they drilled and filed and tried to chip ; and after much labour they made the hole large enough to let out the water from one mark to the next in sixty minutes.

And all the while there hovered around them, invisible, the spirit of him that fashioned the bowl, longing to speak what it knew ; but its time for returning to the flesh was not yet—but it was coming.

V.

THE nineteenth century was ancient history, when one day in a breathless hurrying world, a busy City man was borne electrically home to his suburban villa one hundred miles from the City.

He was tired and morose, and a settled worry clouded his face.

“What is it to-day, John?” asked his wife. “Done nothing again?”

“Nothing,” replied the City man wearily. “Absolutely nothing. Got up at seven—hurried like mad over dressing and breakfast, and managed to get through them by ten, and rush to town—got to town at twelve-thirty, and sat down to write one short letter—finished that by two—saw Brown about the cargo, and said a few words to him by four-thirty—read a telegram and two letters, fast as I could read, by five-thirty—gave instructions, about twenty words, to chief clerk by seven—dashed home again like lightning, and now it’s nearly ten! My dear, this *can’t* go on! The day is over before one has time to breathe! There is no time for anything. It’s all very well to say we live a hundred years now against the seventy of a thousand years ago; but I’m convinced the years have grown shorter. Why—just fancy,

Maria—when I was a boy we used to have time between sunrise and sunset to write out one hundred and fifty lines of Virgil, or row three miles on the river. Why, I saw in a very old newspaper in the Museum lately, that an athlete could once run a mile on the cinder path in four minutes seventeen seconds; and it can't be done now by a champion

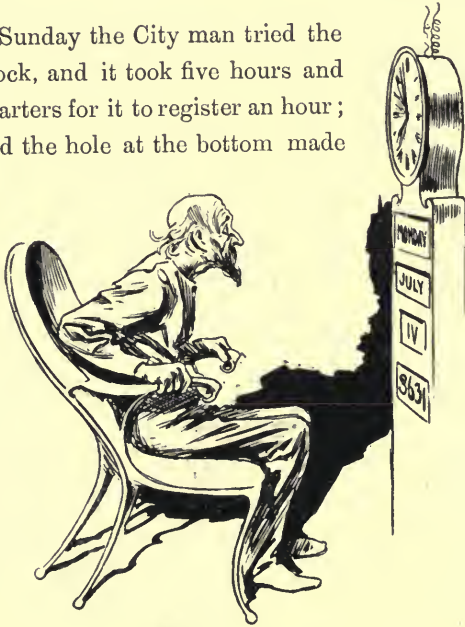


“What is it to-day, John?”

under twenty-five minutes. Halloo! here's the carrier brought that curious old water-clock I bought at the antiquity shop yesterday. . . . You see those faint lines inside? They were to mark the hours—hours, though—no! I'm sure the water would never drip through that little

hole fast enough to sink one of those measurements in an hour. Let's try. . . . Halloa! While I've been talking it's got to one o'clock, a.m.; and we haven't had time for dinner to-day—I mean yesterday. Maria! this *can't* go on! It's killing!"

Next Sunday the City man tried the water-clock, and it took five hours and three-quarters for it to register an hour; so he had the hole at the bottom made



Monday morning.

larger—of more than five times its former capacity; and it registered the hours.

And the spirit of him that had fashioned it hovered ever about the clock, waiting to speak what it knew; and its time was soon to come.

VI.

AND the City man had grown old; and his son was the City man now. And on the morning of Monday he would arise

from bed and shave, and wash, and dress ; and when he had done these things it was Monday night, and he sat down and ate his breakfast ; and when he had finished his breakfast and drawn on his boots, it was Tuesday morning ; and when he had hurried to town, it was Tuesday night ; and when he had opened one letter and one telegram, and said ten words to his clerk, it was Wednesday night ; and when he had dashed back home, it was Thursday morning ; and when he had eaten his dinner, it was Friday morning ; and then a short glance at the newspaper brought him to Friday night ; and then into bed by Saturday morning, to sleep until Monday morning.

And he became an elderly man ; and now he would arise from bed on the Monday morning, and when he had washed and dressed, it was Tuesday morning ; and when he had eaten his breakfast it was Wednesday morning ; so he could not go to town, as there was not time in the week. And men sat down dazed and paralyzed, for there was no time to do anything. And each week they enlarged the hole in the water-clock ; and at the end of each week it dripped too slowly, and fell behind.

And a new Astronomer Royal was appointed ; and in him was the soul, re-incarnated, of him who had fashioned the clock in the dusk of pre-historic ages ; and at last he could tell what he knew.

And he told all men that the thing they had felt was true : he told them how, for many thousands of years, the earth and all the universe had revolved ever faster and faster ; all with proportionate increase of velocity, so that the circuit of the moon kept its wonted time with the revolution of the earth ; and the comets came and went at their expected

seasons, as also occurred the eclipses ; so that no man could know that which was taking place, but only guess. And now each day they enlarged the hole in the water-clock, until the bowl was growing to be *all* hole ; and now they could not bore fast enough in the hard stone ; and now—



The Disadvantages of Mind



IT was the heyday of the pleistocene period. Mrs. Elephas Primigenius sat up and yawned. Then she washed the children in a pond, and untied the rushes with which she curled the hairs at the ends of their tails every night, and brushed down the little ones with a bunch of thorns. Then she went and kicked Mr. Primi-genius as hard as she could.

“What a healthy sleeper George is, to be sure!” she said.

Snatching up one of the children with her trunk, she hurled it in the air, so that it descended with a resounding bump on its father’s head: but Mr. P. only grunted and turned over in his sleep.

So Mrs. P. jumped as high as she could, and came down bang on her spouse. Yet the result was only a larger grunt,

“Gee-orge!” she screamed; “get up, will you? It’s past breakfast time. Gece-horge!”

No use. Then she found a boulder weighing a ton or two, carried it to the top of the rock above Mr. P.’s head, and dropped it over. It descended on Mr. P.’s head with a shock that shook the surrounding cliffs; and Mr. P. opened his eyes, said “Eh, my dear?” and slowly sat up and yawned.

“What a dreadful nuisance you are to wake!” said Mrs. P. crossly. “With thousands of ants boring into your hide, and you asleep like an idiot right in that puddle—enough to lay you up with rheumatic fever, and there I shall be a lone widow with these seven children to support, and it’s a pity you can’t be a little more considerate!”

Mr. P. sat chuckling in a way that frightened the ichthyosaurus, who lived next door, nearly into a fit.

“Ho! ho! Roo-matic fever!” roared Mr. P. “Roo-matic fever! I hain’t delicate, my dear—don’t you bother yourself about *me*. I’m a ’ealthy sleeper, Jane; that’s what I am.”

“You’re a horrid rough lump; *that’s* what you are!” said Mrs. P., thoroughly angry. “A rough, lumping, clumping, lumbering, pachydermatous mass of material, without any mind or sensibilities. It’s a pity you don’t cultivate some sensibilities by improving your mind a bit; *that’s* what I think!”

And Mrs. P. stamped away to pull down a few trees for the children’s breakfast.

Mr. Elephas Primigenius sat where he was. He appeared to be trying to think. He was moody, and not in his usual spirits.

“Horrid rough lump!” he murmured, and sat stroking his trunk with his paw. Presently he muttered: “‘Pachydermatous mass,’ eh? ‘No sensibilities.’ ‘Improve my mind a bit.’ Humph!” And when Mrs. P. returned he was still sitting there pondering.

“Whatever on earth *is* the matter, George?” said Mrs. P.



“You’re a horrid rough lump.”

“You’re not in spirits this morning. Have you eaten anything that disagrees with you?”

“Disagrees with me!” said Mr. P., with deep derision. “Dis-a-grees with *me*!” Dj’yer ever know anything disagree with *me*? It’d have to be a toughish morsel, my dear!”

Yet he certainly was *not* in his wonted spirits. Instead

of partaking of his usual breakfast of half an acre of forest and a few tons of grass, he strayed moodily by the river all the rest of the day, deeply pre-occupied about something; and towards evening he hastily masticated a few trees, and then sat gloomily with his back against a rock until the small hours of the morning; after which he fell into a troubled slumber, punctuated by grunts.

When he woke next morning he went straight off by the river; and Mrs. P. saw no more of him until, going in search of him, she found him minutely inspecting a small plant—sitting and watching it intently.

“Whatever on earth *are* you doing, George?” said Mrs. P. impatiently. “What’s the matter with that little plant, that you’re sitting glowering at it like that?”

“Trying to improve my mind, Jane,” replied Mr. P. “It struck me you were about right in what you said yesterday morning; so I’m looking into things a bit to see ’ow they’re done. I’ve been watching this plant grow—most interesting, my dear, although, o’ course, it’s rather slow work. .But I feel it’s doing me good, Jane; and that’s a fact. There’s a lot of wonderful things a-going on which never struck me before. What makes that plant grow? How does it do it? *Why* does it do it? Dear me? Most absorbin’.”

“Poor George,” said Mrs. P. to herself, “I really didn’t mean it. I’m sure I wouldn’t hurt his feelings for the world; but perhaps it’ll be good for him; he’ll be all the better for something to occupy his mind all day while I’m looking after the children. I’m afraid I don’t look after him so much since little James, and Maria, and Henrietta came,” and she sighed, and went back to busy herself about a new bandage

of grass for little James's foot, which had been bitten by a plesiosaurus that objected to children.



Mr. Primigenius seemed very much changed; every day he would bring home a lot of plants which he was studying, and litter the domestic turf with them. One day he suddenly got up, selected two flints, laid one of them on a granite boulder, took the other with the end of his trunk, and sat patiently tapping it on the first. The little P.'s, who thought it must be some new game, gathered round and watched.

"What are you making, George?" asked Mrs. P.

"A knife, my dear—a dissecting-knife, to cut up the specimens with," said Mr. P., and he chipped patiently until he made a keen edge, while Mrs. P. meditated wonderingly on this change from his old impatient way of tearing and rending anything which offered any resistance to his efforts.

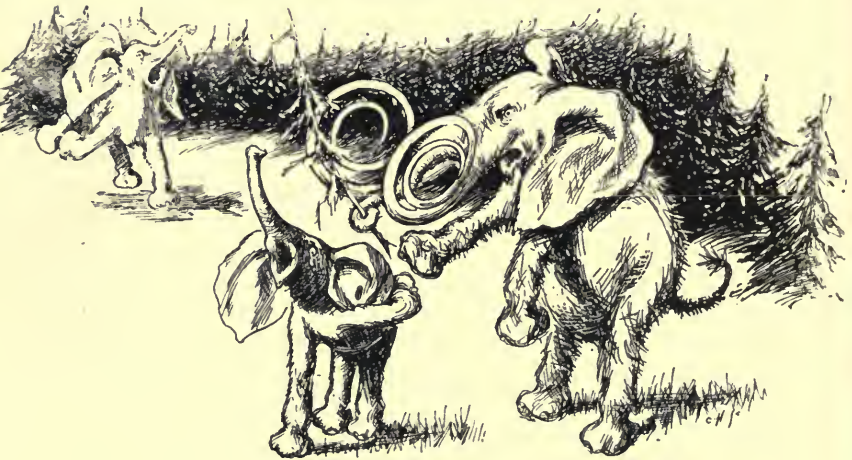
It was a few days after this that Mrs. P. heard dismal wails proceeding from one of the children, and, with a mother's anxiousness, ran hastily up, to find Mr. P. birching little James with a young pine-tree.

"Oh, George! What has he done?"

"Bin eatin' them plants!" roared Mr. P.

“Plants!” said Mrs. P. indignantly. “Of course. Don’t you expect your lawful, innocent offspring to eat plants like their father did before ’em, you unnatural parent? Perhaps you look for ’em to go eating mud like the slimyosaurus and such-like low characters? They’d better let me catch ’em at it—that’s all.

“But, my love,” said poor Mr. P., “they’re my specimens



“Birching little James.”

he’s bin eating, and all after me a-layin’ them out so careful on the shelf! Tell you what; if I’m to improve my mind, I shall have to have a study to myself; and that’s all about it!”

So Mrs. Primigenius went and stroked her husband gently with her paw, and led away little James, still howling; and then she helped her husband to build a wall of boulders round a space of green turf, at the foot of a rock conveniently formed in shelves for the specimens; and this

was Mr. P.'s study; and the youngsters were warned not to set foot in it.

Time went on, and Mrs. P. began to get dissatisfied. She missed the society of her husband, once so cheering to her amid the cares of a family. She sat down by him on the study wall, and took his paw.

"Don't you think, George, dear, that—that you've improved your mind enough now?" she said ruefully. "I never thought you would take what I said so seriously to heart; and I'm sure you're looked upon as quite a superior person now by the mastodon and hippopotamus major, and megaceros hibernicus, and anoplotherium, and all those. They're always talking about your learnedness; and what's more, I'm not sure they're quite pleased about it. They seem to feel hurt; they say prehistoric mammalia were intended to be prehistoric mammalia and behave themselves as such with proper palæozocism, and not go making superior, conceited, stuck-up philosophers of themselves. I heard the hippopotamus say as much to the whatdyecallit vulpiceps only yesterday."

Mr. P. shook his head. "I feel I ought to keep on," he said. "I think it's my mission. Every day I feel more and more how horribly ignorant I am."

"You're not looking so well as you used to," said Mrs. P., with a tear in her eye. "You're paler; and I believe you're thinner. You never trumpet now, like you used to when you were merry; and the children miss it; and I miss the walks we used to take together through the palæodendric glades. You never come and paddle in the lake now. I'm sorry I ever said that about improving your mind!" And she wept.

"I am convinced that study is the right thing—the proper pursuit even for a prehistoric mammal," said Mr. P., thoughtfully; and she could not but notice the remarkable improvement in his method of speech.

It was useless to attempt to stop the ball which she herself had set rolling; and bitter regret alone was left to her.

One evening, some years after this, Mr. P. arose from his studies, and sank wearily down on a knoll outside.

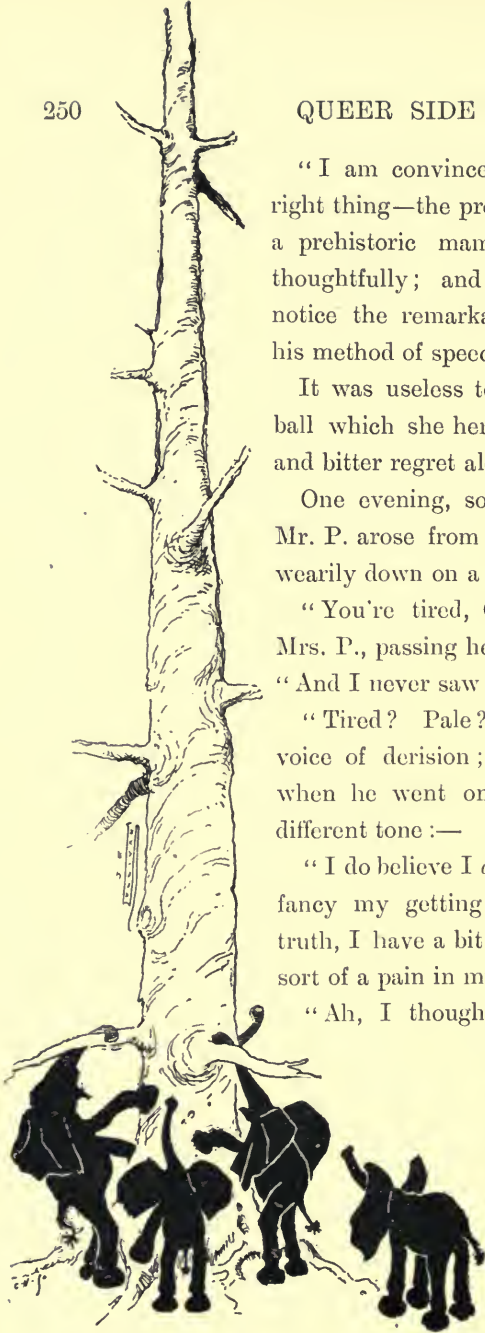
"You're tired, George, dear!" said Mrs. P., passing her paw over his brow. "And I never saw you so pale!"

"Tired? Pale?" began Mr. P., in a voice of derision; but he paused; and when he went on it was in quite a different tone:—

"I do believe I *am* tired, Jane! Just fancy my getting tired. To tell the truth, I have a bit of a headache, and a sort of a pain in my chest."

"Ah, I thought so—indigestion!" said Mrs. P.

Mr. P. looked towards the children, who were trying to pull down a large bulkeyodendron thousandfeetium Jonesii



to play with ; and they came trooping to their father to beg him to pull it down for them ; and Mr. P. rose wearily and plodded towards it.

Seven times he tried to pull down that tree, but without success.

“ I’m—I’m afraid I’m not quite the elephant I used to be, Jane ! ” he said sadly. “ A few years ago I should have thought nothing of pulling down a bigger tree than that—and now— ”

“ Oh, you’re out of sorts, George ; that’s all. Why, you’re quite young yet, as I told that horrid, rowdy hippopotamus the other day when he had the impertinence to suggest that he could pull harder than you—quite young and worth twenty of him ! ”

But in spite of the forced gaiety of Mrs. P.’s tone, a little sigh betrayed her inward anxiety ; and she gazed furtively and sadly at her husband as he went slowly and wearily back to his seat on the knoll.

At that moment the hippopotamus strolled up.

“ Hullo, Primy ! ” he shouted. “ Why, you’re looking off colour ! Lost flesh too, old chappie—lost flesh. Why, I’ll wager you don’t weigh as much as me now ! ”

“ Impertinence ! He weighs as much as ten of you, so there ! ” said Mrs. P. angrily ; but the moment after she regretted that she had said it ; for the hippopotamus told the young elephants to balance a convenient log on a boulder, and invited Mr. P. to sit on one end while he sat on the other, and it was with intense mortification and misgiving that Mrs. P. saw the hippopotamus’s end go down.

“ I do wish those pterodaetyls wouldn’t keep up such a

shrieking!" said Mr. P. It was in the early hours of the morning; and he had lain, vainly trying to sleep ever since he had retired the evening before.

"What with one row and another in this miserable prehistoric forest, I'll be hanged if I can get any sleep! As soon as the *bos antiquus* leaves off bellowing, the confounded *bubalus moschatus* begins; then the palæontological carnivora of Cuvier take it up; then the beastly *machairodus palmidens* begins his yelling; and the



"Pterodactyls."

batrachians begin whistling all out of tune! and—hang it all, I can't get a wink!"

"You didn't mind noises once!" said poor Mrs. P. "You could sleep through anything. Noises are unavoidable in the palæozoic era."

"Why?" said Mr. P. irritably. "Why on earth? Noise is not a necessity, surely? I hate noise. Why can't these fools of animals have a little consideration for their neighbours?"

"Well, dear; you know their other neighbours don't

mind noise, and can sleep through it. Your nerves are really getting dreadfully acute. I wish you had never, never taken up this miserable improving of your mind. You'll be a confirmed invalid—mark my words, George."

He was growing daily more irritable, especially during his fits of indigestion, which were becoming more and more frequent: his appetite had fallen off dreadfully, and he had to be careful about what he ate, being no longer able to digest anything but the tenderest shoots of a few plants. After a time he began to find that his sight was not so good as it had been; and he had to look about for some rock crystal, and slowly and painfully grind down two pieces into convex form, and fix them on each side of his trunk in front of his eyes.

He slept worse and worse, until he found himself the victim of confirmed insomnia.

Poor Mrs. P. would hide herself behind a mountain and sob for hours after she had seen the other prehistoric fauna whispering in corners and pointing at her husband: she knew the malicious delight those uncultivated specimens found in the misfortunes of a fellow-creature.

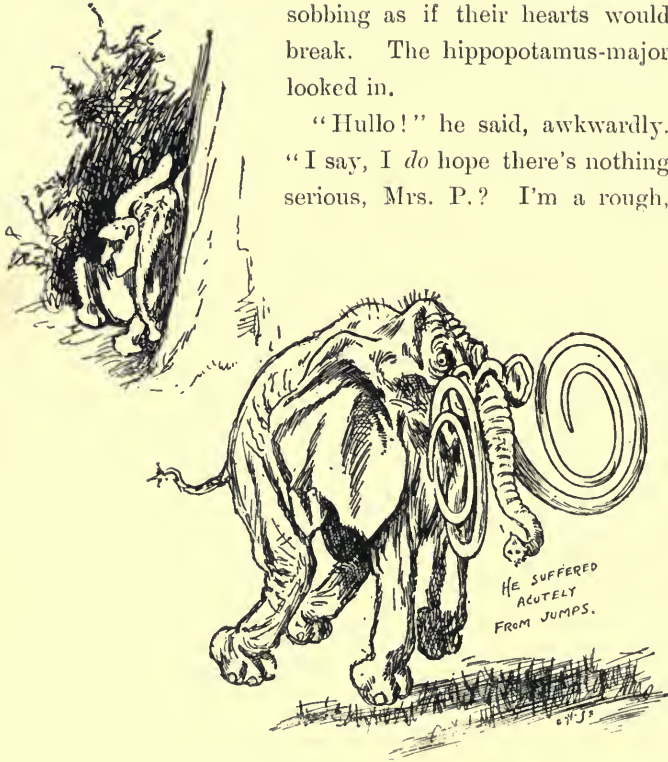
Mr. P. was becoming alarmingly emaciated and bald, and his nerves were dreadful; he suffered acutely from neuralgia and jumps. He knew a great deal by this time, having, in addition to his earnest study of botany, devoted much time to mineralogy and zoology; the latter being a very favourite pursuit, as it gave him much pleasure in his present unamiable and irritable state of mind to catch the smaller vertebrata and subject them to vivisection with that flint knife he had made.

Every day the ravages made by brain upon body became

more noticeable ; Elephas Primigenius was a physical wreck. The acutest form of melancholia set in, resulting from complete nervous exhaustion.

Mrs. P. sat with the little P.'s in the study—they were all sobbing as if their hearts would break. The hippopotamus-major looked in.

“Hullo!” he said, awkwardly.
“I say, I *do* hope there’s nothing serious, Mrs. P.? I’m a rough,



thoughtless fellow, I know ; but if there’s any blessed thing I can do for you—”

“He’s gone !” sobbed poor Mrs. P. “Wandered away ! I’ve searched for him everywhere ! Oh, I’m afraid—afraid that—oh, what *shall* I do ?”

“Deary, deary !” blurted out the hippopotamus, hurriedly brushing his eyes with his paw. “It’s all right, ma’am—

believe me, it's all right. I'm a rough fellow, I know—but—

He hurried away, and searched tirelessly high and low; and at length he came upon the emaciated form of Mr. P. standing gloomily in a shallow pond. In an instant the hippopotamus had dragged him out and was standing over him on the grass.



“Standing gloomily in a shallow pond.”

“P.!” he roared, stamping all his feet with indignation, “what were you doing?”

“Going to put an end to it—drown myself,” said Mr. P. sullenly.

“P.!” said the hippopotamus, “you’re a coward—a coward and a criminal! Be an elephant, P.! Only to think of it, and her at home, crying her eyes out! Just look here, P.—I’ve known her and you for many years, and I tell you I *won’t* stand by and see any more of this tomfoolery. Now you just mind what I say—you go away home right

now, and you smash up every blessed one of them blessed specimens o' yours, sharp—d'ye hear? And if I ever see you studying any blessed thing again, I'll give you such a lathering that—confound my eyes, if I don't break every bone in your body! Now hustle!"

Elephas Primigenius looked at him, and saw the strange fixed determination in his eye, and the scorn and indignation in it; and rose, and gripped his rough paw.

"Hippy!" he said, in a new voice, "I never knew what a good fellow you were till this moment. You have changed me! You are right—I'll do it, every letter of it! You are right—a palæozoic specimen should *be* a palæozoic specimen and act as such, instead of inventing nerves. Don't speak, old chap!"

Elephas Primigenius was never the same fellow he had once been; but he picked up somewhat under careful treatment, and could get about.

He forbade his children to take to any form of study.

Hipopotamus-major called a meeting of the palæozoics, at which it was unanimously carried that "This meeting unreservedly condemns all cultivation of the mind, as tending to injure and undermine the physical health and well-being, and to introduce a most undesirable and disastrous innovation known as nerves: and it considers it the highest duty of the creatures of the palæozoic era to discourage and oppose all undertakings in the direction indicated, and to leave all such foolishness to races of inferior intelligence and wisdom."

So there were no more nerves nor debility until a creature called "man" arrived on the earth.

Abraham Fleeter's Weariness



BRAHAM FLEETER was pacing up and down the room with an air of weariness and disgust ; now and then he would turn aside and take down a piece of old armour from the wall, a piece of old earthenware from a shelf, a Byzantine casket from the overmantel ; then returned it to its place with an impatient grunt.

Mrs. Fleeter, writing letters at a table, watched him from the tail of her eye, and sighed to herself.

Mr. Fleeter threw himself into a chair in front of the clean foolscap paper and pen and inkstand laid out in readiness : he took up the pen and threw it down again in disgust.

“ Can't you get on with your story, Abraham ? ” said Mrs. Fleeter. “ You know the editor's waiting for it.”

“ He can wait ! ” said Mr. Fleeter. “ I'm sick of writing stories—sick and tired ; it's one horrible monotony of writing stories ! ”

“ Then why not do a drawing ? They have been waiting over a week now for the illustrations to that story they sent you.”

“ They can wait another week,” said Abraham “ I'm sick of drawing ; it's one horrible monotony of drawing ! ”

“Then take a rest,” said Mrs. Fleeter, “and play with your armour and things.”

“I’m sick of armour!” said Abraham. “There I see the same confounded pieces on the wall day after day, and week after week; it is so monotonous!”



“I’m sick of armour!”

“Why, you buy a new piece once a week, at least.”

“Just so; and that’s got dreadfully monotonous, too. I want a change.”

“Sell your old stuff, then,” said Mrs. Fleeter, “and buy—”

"*Sell my old stuff?*" shouted Abraham. "What—all those things I'm so fond of—and—and—so confoundedly sick of?"

He walked to the window and stared out; his head gloomily lowered, and the corners of his mouth down.

"What a beastly garden!" he growled.

"It's your own taste—you planted it yourself," said his wife.

"Yes—but what the goodness do the same blessed trees want to stick in the same blessed place for, morning after morning? There's that horrible mountain ash, for example; there it stands every day when I look out after breakfast, always in exactly the same spot; and, what's more, every spring it bears the same dirty-white flowers; and every summer they turn to the same unoriginal red berries; and there they stick—until the same blackbird comes and pulls 'em all off. He *does* do that for me; he feels just like *I* do about 'em; *he* can't see what the deuce they want to come there year after year for, as if the idiots hadn't a new idea among 'em! There was a little relief this year—it certainly did freeze hard a morning or two at the end of May—but I don't like the weather, either."

"Oh, Abraham!" said Mrs. Fleeter, with a tear in her eye; "don't be so discontented! It's really coming to such a pitch—"

"Keziah!" said Mr. Fleeter, very slowly and gravely. "It *is*. I can't stand it any longer, and I *won't*. I *will* have a change—"

"Ah, you had better change yourself!" said Keziah.

"I *will*!" said Abraham, in a low, determined voice; "I *will*. I will not be I any longer—it's too monotonous. I

will not be a draughtsman—nor a writer—nor—Why the deuce—?”

“Don’t swear, Abraham!” pleaded Keziah; but it was too late. There was a low triple tap at the door, and John, the servant, entered as usual to clear away the breakfast things. John was tall and gaunt, with a thin, sallow face, a slight black moustache ending in two turned-up points, a tiny beard also ending in two points, and black eyebrows which sloped upwards from the top of his nose at a steep angle, and finished off in tufts at the highest point. Mrs. Fleeter left the breakfast-room to attend to her house, and John softly closed the door.

Mr. Fleeter was standing looking out of window, with his back to the room. He seemed to grow uncomfortable, and brought his hand round several times to the back of his head, as though a fly were teasing him. He changed from foot to foot, and began to shiver slightly; then slowly turned round as if involuntarily, and looked at John. John was standing with his eyes fixed on his master; and his master gasped and his jaw fell.

“Life *is* monotonous, sir, isn’t it? Very monotonous! There’s some mistake about it all. What’s required is change—change—change! There’s some excitement about change! Who wants to know what he’ll see and do when he gets up in the morning? Who wants to have the same dull, hackneyed round of commonplace experiences to go through day after day and year after year? It’s slow torture—not life at all!”

What Mr. Fleeter ought to have said, and expected to say, was, “John, I’ll trouble you to leave off talking this sort of nonsense and go on with your duties.”

But that's what he did not say. He stood with parted lips, glaring at John, and muttered, "Yes—yes! That's it, exactly! That's what *I* feel—that's—Hang it all, if I could only be something else, suddenly, to-morrow morning!



"John."

"What would you prefer to be, on waking to-morrow morning?" asked John, the servant, bringing out a small, black pocket-book in a strangely business-like manner, and waiting with the pencil on one of the leaves.

Abraham Fleeter gasped a little gasp, and, glaring in a bewildered way at John, rubbed his forehead.

“Better make it as complete a change as possible,” said John. “You are an intellectual, talented man; you make your living by constant mental effort; your mind has kept your body thin; you are a nervous, sensitive man—fastidious and refined in your tastes. Now, suppose you were to wake up a sporting publican?”

Abraham conquered a passing sense of disgust, then said, “Yes, that *would* be a change; that would do capitally.”

“Very good, sir; thank you, sir,” said John softly, and went on clearing away.

All that day Abraham was in a wild whirl of confused thoughts. Uncomfortable misgivings verging upon fear; a vague and disturbing sense of having taken a regrettable step, and an occasional impulse to try to undo it, occupied his morning. After lunch his sensations were less unpleasant, and he gave way to a potent impulse to jeer at his garden, and his armour, and his pottery—and tell them vauntingly that they would see no more of him after that day.

“Yah!” he said to the Elizabethan suit in the corner; “you’ll miss me to-morrow morning, but *I* shan’t miss *you*. My tastes will have changed; I shan’t care twopence for such as you, and I shan’t miss you—do you hear, you monotonous idiot? And you,” he continued, looking out of window at the mountain ash with the dirty-white flowers, “you won’t be able to annoy me with your confounded sameness; so put *that* in your pipe and smoke it!”

That evening Keziah concluded that he must have gone

mad; he chuckled by the half-hour together, and kept winking at her in a way that suggested the knowledge of a "good thing," too enjoyable to be expressed in words. She shook her head, and sighed, and murmured: "Poor Abraham! I must ask Dr. Pillington about him!"

And that night Abraham sank to sleep chuckling insanely: then, before five minutes had elapsed, started from his sleep in terror, and sat upright in bed, muttering about undoing some step or other, and then chuckled again, and nodded at the principal articles of furniture in the room, and said "Ta-ta! By-by! Take care of yourselves!" and once more sank to sleep.

Mrs. Fleeter could not sleep for hours, but lay weeping, for she was sure Abraham had gone mad.

Abraham awoke early. He did not feel seedy. This surprised him very much; for, after the manner of the modern town-worker, he had always felt most seedy and limp on waking in the morning.

Then he remembered, and proceeded to rise. To rise required some exertion, and this came to him as a customary occurrence; but on going into things a little more he discovered that corporeal weight, and not want of muscular energy, had caused the difficulty in rising: he was of considerable bulk—a man of some fifteen stone; portly, and rosy, and the picture of health and content.

For five minutes he stood surveying his reflection in the glass of the wardrobe, and nodded approvingly at himself; then he turned toward the bed where Keziah still lay fast asleep and snoring; and instead of a little, thin, anxious-

looking woman, he saw a large, plump, rosy matron with a little, turned-up nose.

“Kezzie!” he roared, in a great, round, fat voice. “Time to get up! Derby Day; and the cab’ll be round at nine, sharp. Look alive, Kezzie!” He had never called his wife “Kezzie” before—always “Keziah”; but she was not surprised.

When they got down to the breakfast-table in the bar-parlour, they stood face to face with a breakfast which the day before would have made them feel faint with its vulgar abundance and substantiality: there were cold roast beef, and hot sausages, and bacon, and a large jug of stout-and-bitter, and some cold boiled pork, and half-a-dozen boiled eggs, in addition to the ordinary tea and coffee and toast: but Mr. and Mrs. Fleeter promptly sat down to it, and tucked their table-napkins under their double chins, and set to work heartily. With the change new habits had come upon Keziah: they were repulsive to her, for her mind had not altered; but they were part of her new physical personality.

“John!” shouted Abraham, with his mouth full of cold beef and beer.

John, the head barman, entered and stood with his arms a-kimbo: he was a tall, gaunt man, with a thin, sallow face, a slight black moustache ending in two turned-up points, a small double-pointed beard, and tufted eye-brows ascending at an angle.

“Just keep your eye open while I’m out, John,” said Abraham, “and don’t serve old Peters if he’s the least bit fluff. Inspector Jones’s got his eye on the house; I’ve seen him hanging about at the corner. And look out for

that smashing gang and their half-crowns—they were round at the 'Pineapple' yesterday. And if Rasper and Vittrell's traveller looks in again about that whisky he wants to shove on to us, tell him where to find the door sharp. And just keep your eye on George."



"This is what I call a change, Kezzie!"

"Right y'are, guv'nor," replied John. "'Ope you'll 'ave a good time."

"Thankee, John," said Abraham, with a sudden un-comfortableness in his voice, and an eye which turned nervously towards the head barman, and a passing shiver.

All that day Abraham was boisterously contented, shouting with laughter, hobnobbing with the hansom-cabman who drove them down to Epsom, opening bottles of

champagne and offering drinks to everybody about, always trying eagerly to get something on "Honeydew" or "Stewpan," or "Penny Whistle," chaffing the bookmakers, throwing at cocoanuts; and finally returning home, with dolls in his hat-band, in a state of mingled drowsiness and elation.

Keziah had taken her part, too; but underneath her joviality, and showing through it, there was a strange constraint.

"*This* is what I *call* a change, Kezzie!" he said, as they sat before an enormous supper after their return home. "This has broken the blessed old monotony, and don't you make any mistake!"

"You've about hit it there, old'un!" said Keziah, in a fat, rolling voice, impeded by gulps of tea; then she put down her cup, and sighed, and looked sadly at her husband, and continued in quite a low, changed voice: "*It is* a change, indeed, Abraham!"

For two whole months, Abraham Fleeter, the publican, enjoyed himself immensely amid his new surroundings; the unaccustomed excitement of the operations incidental to his new calling kept him interested and drove away ennui; and poor Mrs. Fleeter, seeing him contented for the first spell of time for many years, became almost reconciled to the new and unsuitable circumstances, and had really begun to believe that she should end by enjoying the life of a publican's wife, and wishing for nothing else.

"So long as it can keep him happy, poor dear!" she thought.

But one day, at the end of about ten weeks, Mr. Fleeter had been standing silently gazing out at the bar through

the glass partition separating it from the parlour, when he suddenly said,—

“ Keziah, I’m sick of seeing people come into the bar and take a drink, and pay, and go out ! I wish they’d do something new—come in on their heads, or something ! ”

She looked at him. Through the outer husk of the fat and contented publican she seemed to see the shadow of the discontented writer of old days : Abraham looked appreciably thinner and less rosy—and a fortnight later the change had grown beyond doubt.

“ Must have some more stout in ? ” said Abraham to John, the head barman. “ Hang the stout—I’m sick of having in supplies of stout, and four ale, and gin, and things. How confoundedly—”

“ Monotonous,” said John. “ Yes ; isn’t it ? Who wants to be for ever ordering in supplies of stuff just to have a lot of confounded, saucy people coming in and reducing the supplies again ? ”

“ Just so ! ” said Mr. Fleeter. “ Hang me if I wouldn’t give all I have to—”

“ Yes,” said John ; “ what would you prefer to wake up as in the morning ? ”

Mr. Fleeter pondered a moment, and then said, “ What I want is a life of change and adventure—none of your prosy, humdrum, vegetable existences ! ”

“ Pioneer of civilization ? ” suggested John, drawing out his black note-book. “ How’s that, gov’nor ? ”

“ That’ll do—yes ! ” said the publican.

“ All right, gov’nor—thankee,” said John, moving away to serve two threes of Scotch cold.

At that moment Mrs. Fleeter came in from marketing.

“Cheer up, old lady!” said Abraham, with a strange chuckle. “We’re sick of this, but it’ll be all as right as a trivet to-morrow: you keep your eye on that, Kezzie!”

The publican’s plump wife sat down and sobbed. The old discontent had come back to him in its full force; and he was restless again.

It fell upon her like some tremendous weight, and crushed her. Still, he was again looking forward to happiness in the morning; so she dried her eyes and tried to smile.

Abraham went out, and returned in half an hour with a small parcel; out of it he produced a revolver and cartridges. He went into the bar, and practised at the ornamental bottles and the advertisements stuck on the mirrors. The customers became alarmed, and cleared out rapidly; while John, the head barman, leaned placidly against the counter and looked on with an unpleasant smile of satisfaction. The noise of the shots and the breaking glass made Keziah’s head ache, and nearly terrified her into a fit.

“Just as well to practise a bit beforehand,” said Abraham, in explanation.

“Say, Kez, thisher kinder fits me right down!” said Abraham. “No durned monotony hyar, old woman!”

Keziah sat up in the cart and rubbed her eyes: she pushed aside the dirty rag which formed the tilt, and looked out. Abraham was engaged in helping John to kick a skeleton horse into his place between the shafts. Abraham was a big-boned giant in a tattered grey shirt, slouch hat, and greasy brown half-top boots—on his hips hung a pistol in a case.

John's dress was pretty similar ; but, while John retained his original physical characteristics, Abraham's aspect was wholly changed. But Keziah knew him well enough.

She was clothed in a dirty grey ragged gown, and an old straw hat lay at her side. At her side also, on the floor of the cart, was a small piece of broken hand-mirror.

She looked at herself : her face was grubby and bony ; her tangled hair was hanging all over her shoulders. Her hands were coarse and large, with black edges to the bitten nails. She sank down in the cart and choked with sobs. Then she heard Abraham whistling merrily as he tied knots in the old rope-harness, and she peeped out at him, and sighed and murmured : " So long as it keeps him happy, poor dear ! " and wiped her eyes ; and then smiled and jumped gaily down and set about preparing breakfast. There were materials and utensils : a lump of rancid bacon, some coffee, a lump of bread, a lump of cheese, and an old meat-tin for a kettle.

Abraham was delighted, and whistled, chuckled, and swore incessantly. Keziah learned from John that they had stolen the cart on the outskirts of a small township the day before ; but all this seemed quite new to Abraham, who chuckled over it for a long time.

" We won't have to wait right hyar until they overhaul us, pard," said Abraham. " We'll just have to bustle along with thisher blamed ole thoroughbred and sell the whole durned inheritance at Casey's Bluffs—whaat ? "

" Thur ain't none o' the liar about you, jest fur this minute, Abe ! " replied John.

So they sat over the wheels and hammered on the horse's bones with sticks until the blood dripped.

Keziah shuddered and shut her eyes; but Abraham was so elated and blasphemous that she felt a throb of joy, and thought: "It makes him happy, poor dear!"

There was a small cloud of dust behind, far away over the plain. Abraham and John saw it, and redoubled the hammering on the bones; suddenly the lean horse fell, and a wheel flew off the cart, and the three fell out. Abraham picked himself up and kicked the dying horse all over; he did not look to see whether Keziah was hurt; she rose with difficulty, and when she tried to raise her hand to a bruise on her head, the arm would not go up; and with the other hand she felt two spikes in the middle of her collar-bone, projecting under the skin.

"Oh, that'll jest git fixed up all right when we git to Casey's," said Abraham; "you don't need to go howling around like a coyote about that trifle; yer ken jest let yer arm kinder hang loose like a bell-rope, and smile, and the gentlefolks about won't notice nothing amiss."

He roared with laughter at his own humour.

The small cloud of dust now plainly contained a horseman, a few hundred yards away.

"Reckon I ken drop the varmint commodious from hyar," said Abraham, taking up a kneeling position behind the capsized cart.

"Abraham! Abraham!" stammered Keziah. "You don't surely mean to murder—!" Then she stopped and murmured to herself: "But it keeps him happy, poor dear!" and crouched on the ground, and shut her eyes, and pressed her fingers on her ears.

There were three reports—two from Abraham's pistol and one from that of the pursuing owner of the horse and cart.



“In a flash Abraham’s revolver was out.”

“Reckon the sucker ken lay right there,” said Abraham. “But the nag’ll be useful—whaat?”

So Abraham good-naturedly loaded himself with the silver watch, Smith and Wesson, and knife of the farmer; mounted the farmer’s horse, and off went the three towards Casey’s Bluffs.

Keziah’s collar-bone began to get painful and swell; and she had to keep her arm very still to prevent the spikes of bone wearing through the skin; but she trudged on, and when she saw Abraham grinning with happiness and heard him whistle, she smiled, and walked along with her usable hand on his. It was the middle of the next day before they reached Casey’s Bluffs.

Casey’s Bluffs was (or were) most a timber vitriol-saloon; and Abraham and John promptly entered and called for drinks.

“Hold on!” said the landlord. “I’m thinking you’re them same two innocents as is wanted for thievin’ and murder down to Kearneysville!”

In a flash Abraham’s revolver was out, and the bullet passed through the landlord’s brain.

Then Abraham jumped over the plank bar, and drank off three tumblers of vitriol with great promptness, while John looked on and smiled.

Abraham turned to leave; but two men were entering the doorway. One was the landlord’s brother, and, taking in the situation at a glance, drew on Abraham: Abraham and John replied; and the two new-comers fell dead, and Abraham’s arm was broken close to the elbow.

Then Abraham hurriedly knocked the head out of a cask of petroleum, lighted a handful of straw, and threw it in the

oil covering the floor ; and, with his boots ablaze, leapt on his horse. There was another horse tethered outside ; and John mounted and pulled up Keziah behind him, and the three galloped away over the plain.

After hours they came to a cañon full of undergrowth, and dismounted for a rest. Abraham had brought away a small keg of whisky, and, knocking out the head, tipped it up to his mouth.

“There’s hoofs !” yelled Abraham, breaking away from Keziah and rushing to the top of the gully, followed by John. A dozen shots resounded ; and Abraham and John returned and sat down.

“If any more of the dogs come crowding in after us, they’ll find their pards there,” said Abraham, in a muddled way. “And they can hev ’em—whaat ?”

Then he fell down asleep and lay there till dawn. Keziah still sat there, gazing at him in the grey light. “If it will only keep him happy, poor dear—if !” she said to herself.

Abraham woke, and clapped his hands to his head. He woke John with a kick—then turned deadly white at what he had done ; but John only sat up and smiled his repulsive smile.

“Say, pard,” groaned Abraham. “Guess I’ve got a head onto me that I’d give away cheap. There’ll be a pack of their blamed pals around in haaf a shake, or I ain’t a livin’ fact. Guess I’m about solid sick o’ thisher merriment ; it’s gettin’ blamed monotonous ; an’ so’s thisher arm o’ mine ; scorchin’ like brimstone. Jest you take it as read that I’d trade away my skin to slide slick out o’ this ken o’ existence—”

“What would you prefer to be at this moment ?” asked

John, bringing out the black pocket-book—very greasy—from his boot.

“Why—jest hold on—a bishop.”

“I fear, my love, that absolute unsuitability of temperament unfits me for the Church!” murmured his lordship, gazing sadly out of the palace window at the silent cathedral close. “Heaven forbid that I should think of complaining ;



“If it will only keep him happy, poor dear.”

and yet, at times, I am unable to suppress a sense of monotony—a vague sense of yearning for some existence in which more change, more excitement—”

“Oh, Abraham!” said his wife—a grey-haired matron with sweet and thoughtful brow and an air of singular refinement—“it truly grieves me to hear this. For three days only you have filled your present office, and—” She sighed deeply, folded her hands, and murmured to herself.

“ It does not keep him happy, poor dear ! ” and a tear stole down her cheek.

“ What form of existence would suit your lordship's pleasure ? ” asked John, the venerable butler with the double-pointed white beard and strange tinted eyebrows.

For two days only was Abraham a dervish—for one day a Greek brigand—for one morning a king—for three hours a prize-fighter—for one hour a burglar.

He stood in the dock, charged with burglary at a house and the murder of the owner and two policemen.

The counsel for the defence—John—was speaking eloquently.

The whirl of change had bewildered Keziah ; she had ceased to realize who and what she was. She sank down on the floor of the court and pressed her hands to her aching head, and rocked herself, and moaned : “ It doesn't keep him happy, poor dear ! ”

The Astral Thruppe

(AN IMPROBABLE STORY.)



LOOKING facts squarely in the face, there can be no possible doubt that the new manager, Pawlson, was the cause of all Benjamin Thruppe's misfortunes.

Mr. Thruppe was a flourishing tea-merchant of Mincing Lane; and he had recently stumbled across a man who appeared to have all the qualities desirable in the manager of such a business as his. He was a well-educated man of much information; with a fine palate for tea, acquired by long experience in the tea districts of China, Ceylon, and India. During his sojourn in India he had made an excursion to Thibet: and that is where the harm comes in. Much information obtained in travel, a brilliant gift of narration calculated to arouse intense interest in his hearers, and pleasant manners had speedily given him an influence over Mr. Thruppe.

Now Mr. Thruppe, although a tea-merchant, was a man who easily succumbed to the fascination of the esoteric and the mystical; a man for whom the occult problems of psychology had an absorbing charm. Now these were themes to which the man Pawlson had devoted much

intelligent attention, and on which he was fluently eloquent : and thus were the spark and the tinder brought together, with the inevitable result.

Mrs. Thruppe, with that marvellously prophetic instinct possessed by women, had taken a dislike to Pawlson at sight. " You will regret ever having had anything to do with that man ; mark my words ! " she had said to Thruppe ; but the foolish Thruppe had *not* marked her words, and hence sorrow.

So, after business hours, Mr. Thruppe would linger in the dingy office, listening to his new manager's accounts of the ways of the Hindoo and Thibetan ascetics ; until an emotional chill crept along his spine and his whole being became absorbed in the fascinating theme.

He peppered Pawlson with innumerable inquiries as to the precise ways and methods of the Oriental dreamers and their habit of projecting their astral bodies. And all Pawlson knew he told ; and all he did not know he invented. So Benjamin Thruppe's natural interest in tea began to wane in the delusive twilight of psychical research. There were those who hinted that Ananias Pawlson knew his man. That's as it may be.

II.

ONE evening Benjamin Thruppe arrived home—at his villa, " The Souchongs," Putney Hill—late for dinner as usual. There was a strange, weird gleam in his eye as he placed his umbrella in the art chimney-pot and his hat on the bull's horn ; and he sniffed a long plaintive sniff. There was a world of sad leave-taking in that sniff—a whole harrowing history of touching and pathetic farewell. It was

not a sigh ; and yet it had in it all that a sigh could have, and more.

It was caused by the most savoury smell of a good dinner ; and the self-abnegation in it was a thing not easily forgotten.

Mr. Thruppe stood gazing through his wife, with a far-off look ; a faint, sad smile was on his face. He said, slowly and dreamily,—

“ There are smelts ? ”

Mrs. Thruppe nodded. Smelts were a passion with him.

“ And—and venison ? ”

She nodded again. His love for venison amounted to a mania.

“ And— ? ”

“ And anchovy and parmisan savoury,” she said. His joy in anchovy and parmisan savoury was a by-word.

For a single moment he hesitated. It had always been a habit with him to wash his face before dinner, and to put on a black velvet jacket.

But on this occasion he slowly turned, and very slowly mounted the stairs to his dressing-room—not, as usual, to the bath-room.

Mrs. Thruppe rang the bell for dinner—two long pressures of the button followed by a short one, the customary signal. Then she listened for the usual sounds in the bath-room, and failed to hear them.

“ Tell your master dinner is served,” she said presently to Rebecca ; and Rebecca went upstairs, and came down again to report that master was sitting, in his dressing-gown, on the landing, and would not answer. On this, Mrs. Thruppe went up, and found Benjamin as described. He

sat cross-legged on the floor, his hands crossed upon his waistcoat, his eyes fixed upon a little wall-ventilator in front of him. The moment she caught sight of him she said angrily, "That Pawlson!"

Then she said, "Benjamin, dear, dinner is getting cold. Aren't you coming down? Aren't you well? For goodness' sake, *have* you taken leave of your senses? Don't you know the Wilkinsons are coming this evening? Why don't you wash your face? It's *covered* with blacks!"

Slowly, very slowly, Benjamin Thruppe withdrew his gaze from the ventilator and looked at her; then, as if with an effort, he nodded once, and shook his head once, in answer to the series of questions, leaving his wife to sort out and pair off the questions and answers. Then his gaze returned to the ventilator.

She shook him, and burst into tears. "That Pawlson!" she said again, very spitefully, and went down to the dining-room. She could not eat, being too vexed and upset; and at half-past eight the Wilkinsons came.

Mrs. Thruppe was nervous and awkward.

"Where's Thruppe—detained in town this evening?" asked Wilkins.

"Ye-es—important business," replied Mrs. Thruppe.

"Your maid said he was in," said Mrs. Wilkins.

"Oh, yes, he's in, of course," said Mrs. Thruppe; "that is,—he's—no, he's not exactly in—not quite—"

"H'm. Forgotten to bring my pipe," said Wilkins. "I'll run up and fetch one of Thruppe's out of the smoking-room."

And before Mrs. Thruppe could prevent him, he had rushed upstairs. The landing was dimly lighted, and Mrs.

Thruppe, straining her ears below, heard a heavy fall on the landing, followed by angry exclamations which sounded like swears. Then there was a hot argument, and Wilkins and Thruppe came downstairs.

Thruppe was very angry, and, muttering something which sounded like "prying idiot!" flopped into an arm-chair in his dressing-gown. There he sat and sulked, and would not answer when addressed; so that, after a very unpleasant hour, the Wilkinse went away indignantly.

Mrs. Thruppe, in seeing them out, explained that Thruppe had been very much upset about some incident which had happened in Mincing Lane; murmuring something confused about a chest of gunpowder tea having exploded and blown the office-boy to atoms; and begging them not to speak of Thruppe's strange behaviour to anyone. And next day Mrs. Wilkins called on her friend Mrs. Walker, and told her all about it under strict injunctions to let it go no further; and Mrs. Walker passed it on to seven friends, with the same injunction; and that's how it was the affair never got wind.

The next morning, when the housemaid brought the hot water, she said through the door,—

"Please, m'm, shall I leave the landing?"

"Of course not," replied Mrs. Thruppe. "Sweep it as usual."

"But—if you please, m'm—master—all the dust will go over him."

And then Mrs. Thruppe saw that Thruppe was not in the room. He had resumed his place on the landing.

Mrs. Thruppe had regular days for everything; this was the day for sweeping the landings. But nothing would

induce Thruppe to move, nor to take his eyes off the ventilator.

His breakfast was brought and placed on the floor by his side. There was fried bacon. If Thruppe *had* a partiality, it was for fried bacon. As the perfume of it spread through the air, a slight quivering of the nostrils indicated that he lived ; but that was all.

All that day his letters lay unopened beside him ; and he did not eat.

He was dreadfully in the way. It was the day for cleaning the windows, and pairs of steps had to be carried upstairs. The difficulty attendant on getting the steps past Thruppe was enormous ; for the landing was small just there, and twice he received contusions.

Towards dinner-time the scent of roast goose began to ascend the stairs. There was positively *no* dish which had so great an influence over Thruppe as roast goose, and the quivering of the nostrils was once more noticeable ; but Thruppe steeled himself, and sat living down temptation.

Mrs. Thruppe's distress was beyond words ; but she bore up bravely, and left the gas alight all night on the landing. About 1 a.m. Thruppe sneezed three times, and his wife wrapped the down quilt round him. All her *ruses* designed to startle him into speech failed dismally. She tried darting suddenly out of the bedroom with the information that a mouse was getting down his neck ; she pretended the house was on fire. It was all useless ; Thruppe's determination was terrible.

The next day the cabinet-maker came to bring a wardrobe for the spare room, and matters became acute ; for the piece of furniture could not possibly pass while Thruppe sat

in the middle of the landing; so after much expostulation and consultation, it was decided that the cabinet-maker, his man, and the cook would have to lift Mr. Thruppe and place him in a corner. It was a work of some difficulty, for Thruppe was a heavy man; but he kept himself quite rigid, and they did it.

But about ten minutes after the accomplishment of the effort it seemed to dawn on Thruppe that something had happened, and his eye grew angry, and he sat for a short time apparently waking up; then he suddenly jumped up in a towering passion, and called upstairs to the cabinet-maker.

“Can’t get a moment’s peace in my own confounded house, what with one confounded thing and another!” he shouted. “I had as good as succeeded, when you confounded idiots come and confoundedly undo it all with your confounded antics, confound you! I’ll have no more of it! Look here; just put a gate at the top of that flight, and another at the bottom of this—d’ye hear?”

“Yes, sir,” said the cabinet-maker.

“And lock ’em!” said Thruppe; “and throw away the keys!”

Mrs. Thruppe saw that he was dreadfully determined, and could only sob silently.

The two gates were put up and locked, and Thruppe, smiling grimly, once more took up his position on the landing between them. Why he had chosen that spot was never explained; for in a well-regulated house like Mrs. Thruppe’s the selection caused serious inconvenience. The servants, unable to climb the two gates, had to sleep downstairs in the kitchens; while poor Mrs. Thruppe made up a bed for herself in the library downstairs.

One evening, after the gates had been put up, Wilkins looked in again to see how things were going on. Wilkins was not a bad sort of fellow, and had forgiven the late rudeness; and when he heard of the state of things he was genuinely grieved.

“And he’s getting so dreadfully dusty!” sobbed poor Mrs. Thruppe; “and the flies walk all over him so. And besides, he’s such bad company; and it’s so strange and lonely; and I can’t get over that horrid gate to dust him, and the long-handled feather broom doesn’t do it properly; and I almost wish I had never married him; and I wonder how on earth the Thibetan women allow their husbands to go on in that insane way; and it’s all that Pawlson! the wretch! And how the business in Mincing Lane is going on I’m sure I don’t—oh! what *shall* I do?”

“Pray be comforted,” said Wilkins. “It’s a queer fad, but it’s sure to work itself out in time—all these things do, you know. I’ll just get over the gate and dust him, and I’ll sit and have a smoke with him.”

“Oh dear!” said Mrs. Thruppe. “And he hasn’t had clean socks and things for over a week, nor brushed his hair, nor shaved! It’s dreadful!”

“You wait,” said Wilkins. “As soon as he gets hungry, you know, he’ll pretty soon—”

“Hungry!” said Mrs. Thruppe, “why, the poor dear hasn’t touched a morsel since yesterday week!”

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Wilkins. “It’s a long time to go without anything, isn’t it? He will be getting dreadfully faint. Couldn’t you persuade him to—wouldn’t a little beef tea—? You know, if he goes on like that for another

week—or another fortnight, at any rate—it might be dangerous, mightn't it?"

"Oh, *I* don't know!" said poor Mrs. Thruppe. "All I know is that that hateful Pawlson man always says it's impossible to die of starvation when one has once attained a state of perfect what-do-you-call-it. It's all his doing! and whatever I shall do if Mr. Thruppe can't get back again from that state of what's-a-name, *I* don't know—I shall be a sort of widow. And to-day is the day for doing down the stairs again; and the house *is* getting into such a state; and Jane and Mary say they won't put up with sleeping in the kitchen any longer; and—oh, *I* don't know! I shall insist on that Pawlson man's coming here and undoing Benjamin. *He* has influence over *him*—I wish he had never seen him! I shall telegraph to him now."

Wilkins took a cab and went off to fetch Pawlson, and in about an hour and three-quarters he returned with him. Pawlson pretended to be exceedingly shocked—at least Mrs. Thruppe declared it was all pretence—but said it would never do to interfere with Thruppe, as it might be dangerous to recall him from his present state, and goodness only knew what might result. He also advised Mrs. Thruppe not to attempt to dust him, or brush his hair, or otherwise disturb him.

"But he ought to go to town!" said Mrs. Thruppe. "What will become of his business, and all that?"

"I assure you, ma'am, that you may leave the matter in my hands with the utmost confidence," replied Pawlson, reassuringly. "Nothing shall go wrong."

Mrs. Thruppe did not reply, but looked many things. "I shall send for Dr. Croop!" she said suddenly.

“ I really should not, ma’am ! I should most earnestly advise you not to ! ” said Pawlson. “ The results of medical interference might be absolutely fatal, if, as I believe, Mr. Thruppe’s spirit is at present elsewhere, in a state of khama, rapt in boundless felicity—”

“ Without me too ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Thruppe. “ It’s dreadful to think of the selfishness of men—they’re all alike.”

The next morning the cook and the housemaid wished to speak to mistress.

“ We shall both be very sorry to leave your service, mum,” said the cook, as spokeswoman, “ but we feel we can’t put up with sleeping in the kitchen any longer, and it isn’t comfortable to see master a-setting on the landing dreadful like that, and a-getting so dusty and cobwebby—it really gives us quite a turn every time we catch sight of him. It doesn’t seem ’olesome like. I shouldn’t like to say anything to offend, mum, but when folks is dead they mostly likes to be buried away decent, instead of setting on landings.”

“ Oh, cook, how *can* you say such things ? ” said Mrs. Thruppe. “ Your master *isn’t* dead. I’m sure, if he were, he would never think of playing such pranks as sitting up there like that. You ought to know that he knows how to behave himself better than *that*, and it’s very unkind of you. He’s only in a state of whatever-do-they-call-it—I’ve told you so before. And, if it comes to that, I’m sure neither of you has anything to complain of ; for you have far less cooking to do, cook, and your poor dear master never grumbles about the soup tasting of beetles now—I wish he did ! ” And Mrs. Thruppe burst into tears. “ And you

haven't his clothes to brush now, Rebecca. But, of course, if you are determined to go—"

So cook and Rebecca left, and Mrs. Scrapbag, the char-woman, was called in, and the first time she went upstairs she shrieked and fell down half the second flight on to the mat, and had to be brought to with brandy, and her nerves were so upset that she went away at once with her day's wages, and with her American-cloth bag strangely swollen, not to mention a large brown-paper parcel showing signs of grease.

All this time Mr. Thruppe was steadily getting dustier and dustier, and a spider had connected his head to the gas-bracket by means of a long web.

Then Mrs. Thruppe called in Wilkins—who was really most kind—to advise her what to do.

"It's positively quite dreadful, you know," she said. "What people will think I really don't know. I had to put off the dinner-party last week, and I'm certain the Cressington-Bunthorpes are deeply offended; and it's my at-home day again to-morrow. I might put a label on the knocker to say the cholera is in the house. And then, there's the plumber coming to see to the cistern—oh, *I* don't know! Do help me!"

"I'll just go up and have a look at him again," said Wilkins, working his brain desperately. He climbed over the gate at the top of the stairs, and tried reasonable argument, thus:—

"Look here, Thruppe, old man, a joke's a joke, you know. People are beginning to talk, you know. It's dooced like cruelty and desertion, you know. Suppose you were to be called on a jury, you know—what the goodness

would happen? It's all jolly fine, and *you* may be enjoying *yourself*—"

Wilkins stopped suddenly; in the somewhat dim light of the landing he could have sworn that he saw the left eye close slightly at the outer corner. He went close, and stared fixedly at it, and decided that he must have been mistaken.

"Tell you what, Mrs. Thruppe," he said impatiently, "I shouldn't stand it any longer. Let's put him up in the lumber-room; he'll be just as comfortable there, and more out of the way—"

"Oh, poor dear! I really couldn't!"

"Nonsense!" said Wilkins. "Look here; just get me a screw-driver, and I'll take off this confounded gate, and we'll put him on it as he is, and I'll get the gardener and a policeman to help me carry him up."

The strong resolution of man prevailed, and Wilkins took the gate off its hinges; then he fetched in the gardener and a policeman. The latter got out his pocket-book and pencil.

"It's all right," said Wilkins; "you needn't take any notes."

"Hum! Looks like drunk and incapable, doesn't it?" said the policeman.

"Bosh, man! He's only in a state of—of—you know—what's-a-name—Mahatma. Very common thing at his time of life—often results from a bad cold, and that sort of thing—"

"Well, if it isn't infectious—and you don't want to charge him?" said the policeman.

"No; that's all right. Look here—you two just tip him

back a bit—carefully, you know; don't break him—while I slide this gate under him bit by bit. That's it—a little more—easy does it. Now ease him on to the middle of it; there, he'll balance so. Now get your fingers under the corners of the gate—look out—don't let him fall over and break."

It was hard work; but, with the additional assistance of the two ladies, they managed to carry Thruppe slowly up to the lumber-room and deposit him in the middle of the floor.

"Don't you think we ought to dust him a bit?" said Wilkins; but Mrs. Thruppe, mindful of the warning of that man Pawlson, thought they had better not; so they locked the lumber-room door and left him.

That evening Pawlson looked in, inspected Thruppe, and expressed satisfaction and confidence.

"A trifle thinner, my dear madam, of course—that is inevitable; but doing excellently."

"And *how* long is this to go on, may I ask?" said Mrs. Thruppe. "For ever possibly?"

"Certainly not! Pray do not be uneasy. A little patience. I have no doubt that in another year or two—or let us say five or six—or put it at seven or eight, at the most—"

Mrs. Thruppe sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"And meanwhile, my dear madam, you may safely leave the Mincing Lane business in my hands. I will shortly give myself the pleasure of submitting the books for your inspection."

"What is the use of that? I don't understand business books!"

"Not of the slightest importance, madam—a mere detail."

“It will be better if you show them to Mr. Thruppe’s solicitors, Bedford and Row—”

“I fear, madam, that such a course—the making public, so to speak, of commercial secrets, might—nay, certainly *would* meet with the decided disapproval of my excellent chief, Mr. Thruppe. He has often said, most emphatically, that—”

“Oh, *I* don’t know!” said poor Mrs. Thruppe. “And his poor dear hair not cut now for six weeks; and his chin getting so stubbly; and no clean socks and things—oh, dear—oh, dear!”

III.

“WELL, this *is* a change for the better,” said Wilkins, dropping in one evening. “At least—well—it *is* a good thing he’s about again; isn’t it, in any case? Of course it’s a pity that—of course he always *used* to be such a particularly steady man; but, no doubt, after this long spell of inactivity and dulness—for, of course, you know, it must have been dooced dull work sitting on that landing, and in the lumber-room, eh? So perhaps it’s excusable—more or less; and he’ll soon settle down again. Where is he—in the smoking-room?”

“Where is who?” said Mrs. Thruppe. “I don’t understand! Is *who* in the smoking-room?”

“Thruppe, of course.”

“It’s too bad of you to poke fun at me!” said Mrs. Thruppe, crying. “You know very well he’s in the lumber-room, poor dear; and so thick with cobwebs, and dust, and flue that I can’t see his very nose!”

“But that’s pure nonsense, my dear Mrs. Thruppe!” Then Wilkins hesitated suddenly, and muttered to himself, “He hasn’t told her, of course. What a chattering idiot I am. Of course, he wouldn’t tell her; but I thought *any* change would be so much for the better! Hang it!” Then he said aloud, “Hasn’t come home yet, this evening, then?”

“I really fail to see the joke, if there *is* any!” said Mrs. Thruppe indignantly. “I’m sure you must have gone out of your mind—if you are not tipsy!”

Wilkins turned very red and sheepish of aspect, and said, “Please give me the key of the lumber-room.”

He took the key, darted upstairs, and unlocked the lumber-room door. Then he entered—gasped—and called over the bannisters to his wife, who went up. “I say, Allie!” he whispered, “don’t be alarmed, you know—he’s *here!*”

“*Here?*” said Mrs. Wilkins, turning pale.

“Here, sure as a gun! Hasn’t moved either! Look at the cobwebs! What the dev—*am* I tipsy, Allie? Why—perhaps I’m mad!—didn’t I tell you I saw Thruppe at the Empire last night—going it, too—champagne and all that—good bit mixed in his speech? Didn’t I say he had a fine old row with two bobbies and a female outside, and nearly got locked up?”

“You certainly did, James!”

“Well, then, *I* must have been drunk—that’s all I can say! Oh, pooh—it *can’t* have been old Thruppe after all—and yet it was a most marvellous likeness—and the voice, and the manner, and everything. Dooeed queer! Yet, after all, I never addressed him by name; so it *must* have

been somebody else, exactly like him. Of course, he was a most steady-going old cork, and never *used* to frequent music-halls—yet, still! Confound it all—well—well, I must have been drunk, or dreaming, or that's all about it!"

At that moment Wilkins could have sworn that there was a slight movement under the dust which covered Thruppe's left eye, and that some of the dust fell off.

"Hum!" said Wilkins. "You'll have to make up something anyhow. Just explain to Mrs. Thruppe, behind my back, that I *did* come home the worse for liquor last night—been dining out—and didn't know what I was talking about. I shall go down in her estimation; but that can't be helped."

And Mrs. Wilkins obeyed; and Mrs. Thruppe was properly disgusted; and the affair blew over for the time.

Mrs. Thruppe grew more and more miserable. The moth was getting into Thruppe; and she could not venture to beat him; and the moth, once in the house, would be sure to spread to the carpets and blankets. If Mrs. Thruppe had a hobby, it was cleanliness; she could not bear dust, flue, cobwebs, or moth; and there were the whole list of them, and not to be checked. She was sinking into a dull despair.

IV.

"It's the strangest thing I ever knew, Allie!" said Wilkins, arriving home from business. "I've seen that fellow again who bears such a marvellous resemblance to Thruppe! And the thing that makes it stranger is that he

knows my name and circumstances! I had occasion to look in at the Gaiety Bar to-day—on business—and there was my man. He hailed me the moment I got inside the door—called me by my Christian name, too, just as Thruppe used!—and insisted on my having some champagne. He had a magnum, and a lot of rackety fellows helping him to drink it. He was decidedly fluffy; and nearly got turned out. I didn't half like being seen with him. It *couldn't* be old Thruppe, anyway, of course; because Thruppe was so *particularly* abstemious, you know—absurdly so, I always thought—and so scrupulously steady and particular; wasn't he? Well, *I* can't make it out: it's one too many for me. By the way, he sent his love to *you*: called you 'Allie' too—like his confounded cheek, I call it! Roared out the name so that everybody could hear it, and said you were a proper little tart—and yum, yum! I'd have punched his head, if he hadn't been fluffy: but I didn't want to be mixed up in a row: so I left."

"*Well!*" said Mrs. Wilkins. "Disgraceful! Don't you ever speak to that low person again! 'Proper little tart,' indeed! Couldn't you do your business *outside* the Gaiety Bar?"

"Creates an obstruction, my love—police don't like it. By the way, don't you think we ought to take Mrs. Thruppe out now and then, to distract her mind a little? Let's take her to see the Geisha, eh? I'll get tickets to-morrow."

On the appointed evening the Wilkinses and Mrs. Thruppe sat in the front row of the dress circle.

During the performance they became conscious that something unusual was going on in a private box. Those

occupants of the box whom they could see, and who were plainly a loose lot, were evidently endeavouring to keep in order another occupant who sat facing the stage, and who was therefore invisible to them. Now and again a shout, or a snatch of bacchanalian song would proceed from the box, attracting the attention of the audience, and interrupting the performance. Presently a hand appeared, waving a champagne bottle: and the actors paused in their work; then a stout, middle-aged gentleman in a genial state of inebriation came to the front of the box, and, joyously waving the champagne bottle, burst into a jubilant music-hall song.

The others in the box tried to drag him back to his seat; all was confusion: while the middle-aged roysterer looked slowly and gaily round the auditorium.

Mrs. Thruppe, with a gasp, had sprung to her feet, and stood glaring at him; and Wilkins was trying to induce her to sit down, and whispering, "It's all right! It isn't he—there's a man about exactly like him. I assure you it isn't—"

"Hullo, Polly, old girl!" shouted the roysterer, staring straight at Mrs. Thruppe, and kissing his hand lovingly. "Who'd 'v expected see you here? Here's luck, Polly!"

He raised the champagne bottle to his lips.

"'Isn't he,' indeed!" gasped Mrs. Thruppe. "Do you hear him addressing me by name? Oh, I don't know how he got here—but I must go to him!"

She hurried round to the door of the box, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins; only to find that the roysterer had been marched off by a policeman.

"Look here," said Wilkins, "I'll put you in a cab; and Allie will take you home: and I'll hurry round to Vine

Street and do what I can. But I solemnly assure you there's some mistake, and it really is not Thruppe. Pray go up to the lumber-room when you arrive home, and satisfy yourself!"

So, having put the ladies in a hansom, Wilkins hurried round to the police-station; and there he found the roysterer being charged.

"Hullo, Sam, m' boy!" shouted the disgraceful person. "How you, ole f'ler? How's Allie? Sweet little party Allie, Mr. 'Spector! Have pleasure ver 'quaintance, have you? Here's y' joll good health, anyway!"

"Do you know this person?" asked the inspector.

"Yes—I—that is—" began Wilkins. He thought of the inert Thruppe seated respectably in the lumber-room, and felt that this roysterer must be a stranger; then he thought of the roysterer's intimate knowledge of his personal affairs and of his recognition of Mrs. Thruppe, and decided that—and suddenly the truth flashed upon him convincingly: this *must* be the astral body of Thruppe. Wilkins had always hitherto scoffed at such superstitions: but what was he to do now?

He said, "Yes; he's a very old friend of mine, and a most steady, respectable person, I assure you."

"Doesn't seem to behave like it!" said the inspector.

There was no way out of it; the Astral Thruppe had to go to the cells; and would be brought up next morning.

Wilkins went dismally home to Thruppe's, puzzling greatly as to what course to pursue. He had wild ideas of attempting to prove an alibi by means of the mundane body in the lumber-room; yet how could one prove an alibi in respect of a person taken red-handed?

Besides, the publication of the facts about the mundane body would cause a terrible public scandal, and subject Mrs. Thruppe to unbearable persecution at the hands of reporters and interviewers from monthly magazines. Better keep the original body in the dark; and treat the astral personality as unique. The worst of it was that the astral roysterer had distinctly given his—or its—name as “Benjamin Gunnersbury Thruppe, of no address in particular.” The omission of the address was a merciful thing; but there was the name.

When Wilkins had joined the ladies, the three formed a dismal party. Mrs. Thruppe was terribly upset and hysterical. The fact of the astral projection could not be kept from her; in fact she had grasped it without assistance. The thing was perfectly patent, with no shadow of a doubt; an actual, scandalous manifestation of occult psychological eccentricity, intruding upon the very hearth of quiet suburban civilization! What *would* respectable society say if the whole dreadful truth got into the papers? It would have to be hushed up as far as possible!

V.

WILKINS attended the court next morning, and did all he could; and, in consequence of his assurances of the previous respectability of the prisoner, and of his undertaking to keep an eye on him in the future, the disreputable astral body was let off with a reasonable fine; and left the court in company with the witness.

“I *have* got a head on me, and no mistake!” said the astral Thruppe. “Let’s go and have a drink at the Gaiety.”

“No!” said Wilkins, firmly. “Look here, you’re simply behaving disgracefully, and making a horrible scandal. You just come straight home and—and get into your skin like a decent person!”

At this point Wilkins had to drive away a crowd of boys who were following his disreputable companion, and throwing mud at his hat. He was a disgraceful object to walk with; his coat was all mud from a fall in the gutter on the way from the theatre; and his hat was smashed.

“Who’s going home?” said the Astral Thruppe. “Not me! *I’m* going to get a drink. Haven’t a spare fiver about you?”

“I haven’t,” said Wilkins. “I’ve just paid your fine, and if I *had* a spare fiver I would not let you have it to drink with.”

“Don’t preach!” said the Astral Thruppe. “I hate confounded goody-goody prigs. I’m off to Mincing Lane.”

“Mincing Lane—in *that* condition?” said Wilkins, in horror. “You can’t go there. It would create a horrible scandal! You used to be so respectable and tidy.”

“Pooh! Go there every day, I tell you—twice a day sometimes.”

“Whatever for?”

“Money. Get money from old Pawlson, don’t you see; and go and blue it right away.”

Wilkins stopped aghast.

“How much have you blueed up to now?” he asked.

“Eh? Don’t know to a hundred or so—pretty good lump, though,” replied the Astral Thruppe with an idiotic chuckle.

Wilkins grasped him by both shoulders and stood glaring at him.

“Look here, you astral lunatic!” he said. “Don’t you know it’s *your own* money you’re blueing, as you call it? Why, you’ll be ruined in a few months like this!”

“Pooh! It’s the other old duffer who’ll be ruined. What do *I* care?”

“*What* other old duffer?”

“Why, that slow, respectable, old, doddering, goody-goody buffer in the lumber-room.”

“You wretched madman! That old buffer in the lumber-room is *yourself!*”

The astral Thruppe stood with his arms a-kimbo, and winked a wink of idiotic knowingness.

“*Me*, eh? What do *you* think? Do *I* always go home to tea like a sniffing old Puritan? I mean to let him know before *I’ve* done with him. I’ll sell him up, if he doesn’t mind his eye.”

And the Astral Thruppe started off towards Mincing Lane, dropping into most of the public-houses on the way; while Wilkins, utterly shocked and puzzled, was striving to arrive at some plan for putting a stop to this insanity.

At length they arrived at the Mincing Lane office, and the Astral Thruppe reeled in, closely followed by Wilkins. Pawlson did not appear pleased at the sight of Wilkins, and looked uneasy.

“Tip us another hundred—or make it a hundred and fifty, old coon!” said the astral Thruppe, digging the manager violently in the ribs, and falling into a chair.

“I should like to have a word with you,” said Wilkins, drawing Pawlson aside. “Surely you do not intend to go

on supplying this raving old lunatic with funds—funds out of the business—to fling in the mud like this?”

“I am at a loss to catch your meaning, Mr. Wilkins,” replied Pawlson stiffly. “To begin with, I fail to understand your alluding to my revered principal as a ‘raving old lunatic’; and, to go on with, I fail to recognize your right to interfere in the business between my employer and myself!”

“Your employer! This—this astral person is not your employer!”

“Not my—? Perhaps you will be good enough to explain, Mr. Wilkins.”

“Look here!” said Wilkins, in a towering rage; “I tell you I won’t have it! It’s illegal! You are defrauding your employer, and robbing his wife! Do you hear me? I shall simply call a policeman, and give you in charge—!”

Pawlson smiled.

“What authority have you, sir, to part with your employer’s money to—to this—to an—”

“To my employer? Oh, merely my employer’s signature in the books—that is all. I fear, Mr. Wilkins, that you have been indulging too freely in stimulants. Permit me to show you the door.”

“I—I decline to go!” said Wilkins, white with rage. “If this—this *is* your employer, I appeal—appeal to—”

“Do you wish this person to remain here, sir?” asked Pawlson.

“What, *him*?” said the Astral Thruppe. “Tur’m, out! Kick’m dow’sstairs. Confoun’ead! Dow’s’w’m!”

Wilkins looked round helplessly, and went out to get his head cool, and think.

“Look here, old 'un,” said Pawlson, when Wilkins had gone. “It won't do. You'll have to draw in your horns a bit. You can have five pounds to-day, and that's all.”

“Wadjer mean? Like yer conf—confoun'd imper'nence! Shlav 'smuch zilike! Gimme couple hundred!”

“I shall not. What then?” said Pawlson.

The inebriate Astral Thruppe staggered to his feet. “Wha' then?” he repeated; “I'll pritty soon letchknow wha' then!” Here he steadied himself with the lappel of Pawlson's coat. “'Fu don' hand over the cash, I'll lay note by th' side of ol' buffer in lumber-roo—room, stating that you've mur—murdered him; an' then I'll dishpear—*that's* 'wha' then'! D'ear? You'll be hang—hanged—dangle li' this! D'ear? I'll shay you pois—poisoned him to ge' the bus—bus'ness intierown hands—they'll hang y'—D'ear?”

It was Pawlson's turn to grow pale.

“S'pose *I* do'no wha' yer at?” continued the Astral Thruppe. “S'pose *I* do' know you've done all thish t'make me dring m'self to blazes, an' fade out, so 's you'll get the bizness—garn?”

“I'll tell you what!” said Pawlson desperately. “If you don't look out I'll denounce you as an impostor who has thrown the real Mr. Thruppe into a mesmeric state for your own ends—”

The Astral Thruppe broke into a scream of laughter, and regularly danced round the room, upsetting everything.

“Wha'll they do then?” he asked.

“Why, hang *you*!” said Pawlson, catching at a straw.

“Hang *me*? He, he! Here's game! See this umbrella—loo' 'ere—see me shove it right through me—see th' end

of it comin' out at back of me. Ver' well—doesn't hurt little bit. Do' feel it. Jus' you shy that ingstand at me—there! Gone slap through, and left lot o' splashes inshide me! Yah! 'Ow y' going hang me? Better begin! You jes' han' me my cheque-book—d'ear?"

Pawlson winced, wrote the cheque, and got the Astral Thruppe's signature; then Thruppe rolled out; found Wilkins; and took his arm.

"Come 'long," he said. "Yes, go an' cash cheque; and then we'll go and 'ave good old lark—go an' call on Mish—Mishes Thruppe and pass time o' day."

"You *can't* do this! It's perfectly horrible! You *shan't!*"

"Sha'n? Wadjer propose t' do?"

"I'll—I'll kill you first!" said Wilkins, wildly.

"Wha'? Murder old buff—buffer in lumber-roo'! B'sides—how y' going to begin?" And he rolled off along the street, screaming with laughter. Presently he climbed on the top of a Putney omnibus; and Wilkins, grimly determined to see this thing out, climbed up too. The Astral Thruppe amused himself by passing round a black bottle which he produced from his pocket, and by roaring music-hall songs and chaffing passers-by; and when he descended from the vehicle at Putney, all the dirty boys in the place followed him up the hill, hurling mud at his hat. Outside his own gate he had a row with a workman, and chucked the next-door housemaid under the chin; and then he played a tremendous tune on the knocker of his own door, and rolled in.

"Hello, Polly, ol' gal!" he shouted, embracing Mrs. Thruppe with one hand and offering her the black bottle

with the other; while Wilkins stood helplessly on the door-mat.

Mrs. Thruppe pushed away the Astral Outrage, and shuddered, and looked helplessly at Wilkins.

"It's dreadful!" she said. "What ought I to do? How *can* this be Mr. Thruppe, when the poor dear is sitting so dreadfully still upstairs, with nests of spiders in his hair, and the moth all over him? *Do* help me!"

"I can't!" said Wilkins. "It's one too many for me!"

"Oh, what *would* poor dear Benjamin say to this—and he so particular!"

"Tha's me!" said the Astral Disgrace, chuckling idiotically. "I'm Benjamin; but I'm not particular—not a ha'po'th."

"Oh, if he would only wake up!" sobbed Mrs. Thruppe.

"Who?" said the Astral Desperado. Then his eye suddenly flashed with rage as he went on, "Oh, *I* know. You mean that ol' rascal among the cobwebs. Lemmee girratim—tha's all!" His eye suddenly lighted on the key of the lumber-room hanging on the hat-stand, and, snatching it off, he dashed upstairs.

"Oh, Mr. Wilkins—what *is* he going to do? Stop him!" cried Mrs. Thruppe.

"Goin' to set light to the ole beast—*that's* wha' I'm goin' t' do!" roared the Astral Swashbuckler.

Mrs. Thruppe and Wilkins threw themselves upon him to stop him; but the astral body was wanting in solidity; being certainly tangible, but not sufficiently firm to hold. Their fingers seemed to go into him, while he howled with rage, and dashed up into the lumber-room. There he danced round and round the cobwebby mundane body, jeering,

threatening, and loading it with the grossest insult and vituperation.

“Set light to the ol’ beast!” he said at last, striking a match and applying it to the dressing-gown of the seated figure.

Mrs. Thruppe and Wilkins darted forward, upsetting the mundane body; there was a slight tremulous motion of the hands; the body began to cough and sneeze; Mrs. Thruppe hastily brushed the cobwebs from the face, which was grey with dust and soot. The voice and antics of the Astral Outrage were becoming more feeble, and the appearance shadowy and unreal; then it could hardly be seen; then it had gone; and the mundane body blinked, sneezed, coughed, and sat up slowly and stiffly, with many expressions of discomfort.

“Bless my soul!” said the genuine Thruppe. “Dear me! Confoundedly stiff! Must have taken cold somehow. Dear me—why—what’s all this flue and cobweb and—hullo, Mary, my love—why—where the dickens am I? Eh? What? Khama? What’s that? If it’s something to eat, I don’t mind a little—I’m famished!”

It was fully a week before the stiffness had all worn off. Meanwhile Pawlson the manager had absconded to South America with all the capital of the tea business which was immediately available.

Altogether Mr. Thruppe’s losses turned out to be very considerable; and the business required a good deal of pulling together. Mr. Thruppe has given up Mahatmaism.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LTD.,
ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL, E.C.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

NOV 19 1992 *u/cw*

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 001 365 091 6

